

**Committee: Community and Housing**

**Agenda Item**

**Date: 20 January 2011**

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**Title: Lead Officer Report**

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Item for information

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## Summary

1. This report advises members of any updates from the previous meetings and provides information put forward by officers regarding the services that report to this committee.

## Recommendations

2. That the report be noted.

## Situation

### 3. Empty Homes Update

A report is going to the next Full Council meeting seeking the necessary authority to make a compulsory purchase order in respect of a long term empty property in Saffron Walden.

A number of property owners have expressed an interest in the PLACE scheme which uses funding from a successful bid by a consortium of Councils to bring long term empty properties up to the decent homes standard in return for granting a three year lease to a nominated RSL to house families from the Council's waiting list. The process of accepting properties onto the scheme is at an advanced stage in respect of properties in Henham, Thaxted, Wicken Bonhunt, Manuden and Saffron Walden.

Letters were sent out to the owners of 57 empty properties in October that had been listed in the Council Tax records as empty since at least January 2010 and subsequent information revealed that 10 were in the process of being renovated, 5 were on the market for sale, 5 were annexes to larger homes and 8 are now occupied, another 10 had acceptable reasons for being unoccupied. The owners of the remaining properties will be receiving follow up letters during January 2011.

### 4. Recession Impact – Housing Options/Homelessness Update

The Council has been notified that its future Preventing Homelessness Grant allocation will be £85,470 per year from 2011/12 this is up from the current £60,000. We have been told that this reflects the priority placed by government on the preventative work that we undertake and that because we have been achieving demonstrably positive outcomes within our local area the

increased grant allocation has been provided to support and ensure the continuation of this important work.

The Housing Options/Homelessness Prevention team will be working closely with our colleagues in Housing Benefits over the coming months as some of the Government's changes to Housing Benefits start to take effect. One of the first that will impact on Council, RSL and private housing tenants is the increases in the non dependant deductions. These have increased in April from £47.75 to £60.60 a week for the highest deduction, the next level has gone from £43.50 to £55.20 a week and the lowest deduction is now £9.40 instead of £7.40 a week.

Prior to Christmas we have already started to make use of the new emergency temporary accommodation at Molehill Green with two of the four units currently occupied. We have also used up this year's allocation of rent deposit guarantee money and have been relying on recycled funds to be able to continue to assist potentially homeless people into private sector housing, however this funding will also shortly run out.

The number of people seeking housing advice is continuing at its high level with 728 seeking housing advice between April and December 2010.

#### **5. Holloway Crescent update**

Progress on site continues to be good and it is estimated that completion of the properties will be ahead of schedule.

#### **6. Local Decisions: A fairer future for social housing – consultation document**

The government has published a consultation paper on the future of social housing called *Local Decisions: A fairer future for social housing*. The paper sets out the Government's proposals for a fundamental reform of the provision of social housing in England.

It includes changes on tenure, the management of waiting lists and the homelessness duty. It covers the introduction of a new 'affordable rent' tenancy and changes to the system of council housing finance. It also includes measures to improve mobility, and tackle overcrowding and under-occupation.

The document sets out the government's 5 key objectives of social housing reform building on previous announcements around security of tenure and fairness made last year. There are 5 key objectives of social housing reform:

- Localism, fairness and focusing social housing on those most in need in a way that enables them to use it as a springboard to opportunity
- Social housing is flexible and available to more people and to those that genuinely need it

- Make the best use of the four million social rented homes
- Increase the freedoms available to all social landlords to determine the sort of tenancy they grant to new tenants.
- Protect the rights of existing tenants

The main proposals are:

- Create a new local authority flexible tenancy with a minimum fixed term of two years. This will be in addition to, rather than replacing, secure and introductory tenancies
- Invest £100m to bring empty homes into use as affordable housing
- Give local authorities the powers to manage their housing waiting lists
- Introduce a nationwide social home swap programme for social tenants
- Enable local authorities to fully discharge a duty to secure accommodation by arranging an offer of suitable accommodation in the private rented sector, without requiring the applicant's agreement
- To seek views on the reforms needed to enable local authorities and landlords to tackle overcrowding
- Reform of social housing regulation in line with the recommendations of the review of the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) and the social housing regulation framework
- Replace the Housing Revenue Account subsidy system with a transparent, self-financing arrangement

The proposals to reform social housing are wide-ranging and will affect Landlords, tenants and housing professionals significantly. If the Council were to embrace the government's plans fully, those on the waiting list could be offered a range of options of secure and flexible tenancies at both social and new affordable rents.

A response document from Uttlesford Council is being prepared for submission by the deadline of 17 January 2011. Due to the tight timescales set by Government the only opportunity open to officers was to discuss it with the Housing Initiatives Working Group and the Tenant Forum. There was an overriding concern that some of these proposals, if implemented, may fragment communities and work against principles of stable and cohesive communities. A full copy of the response document will be circulated to members at the meeting.

After the consultation, reforms will be introduced through the Localism bill and through a revised tenancy standard, probably in autumn 2011.

## 7. Section 106 Obligations

The Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 7 December recommended that the relevant policy committees review the financial contributions collected through planning obligations. The objective of the recommendation was to enable policy committees to assure themselves that the funds would be used within any specified time limits for the intended purposes. The funds relevant to this committee are contributions related to the provision of affordable housing and community facilities in the main. The Scrutiny Committee requested that the council commence discussion with the relevant local council about the use of money not yet fully allocated. This applies to Forest Hall Park (Birchanger and Stansted) and Bell College (Saffron Walden). The full table of contributions is appended.

The Scrutiny Committee specifically requested that the Committee reviews the use of funds received under the Stansted Airport 2003 Agreement and ensures that it has a plan for its appropriate use. The Housing Initiatives Working Group is considering options for Holloway Crescent, one of which would involve use of Stansted monies. Officers always consider whether there is case for designating any proposals for the affordable housing development programme as Stansted Area Housing Partnership schemes, including the case for potential funding from the Stansted funds. It is one of the principles of the partnership strategy that sites should be delivered through the SAHP unless there are specific reasons why a site is not appropriate.

The sum of capital infrastructure contributions received by the Council but not expended is as follows:

Sum	Source	Purpose	Comments
£2,673,253.59	Stansted Airport 2003 Agreement. Funding received in 2004/5.	Provision of affordable housing through registered social landlords within Uttlesford, Harlow, and parts of East Hertfordshire and Braintree districts.	Funding underpinning the Stansted Area Housing Partnership. No money has been drawn down since receipt in 2004/5 because the SAHP has been able to attract other funding from the Housing Corporation and DCLG Growth Area Funding. The original sum

			(£2.2m) has accrued interest. Although delegation arrangements were put in place recently to make it easier for partner authorities to draw down funds for schemes in their areas, no requests have been received. No timescale is specified in the obligation for the expenditure of the sum.
£430,419.18	Forest Hall Park (Rochford Nurseries), Birchanger and Stansted	Community facilities payments	First of two index-linked instalments by Taylor Wimpey towards indoor sports facilities or other leisure recreational and / or community facilities in the District arising out of or reasonably related to the needs of Forest Hall Park residents. Any money that is unspent and uncommitted ten years after the second instalment is paid is required to be returned to the developer.
£203,239.08	Priors Green, Takeley	Community Facilities	Sum is allocated to the

	<p>and Little Canfield</p> <p>£13,272 received 2008</p> <p>£88,173.08 received 2008</p> <p>£115,066 received 2010</p>	<p>Enhancement sum (£146 per unit) and Community Facilities Equipment sum (£1,750 per unit). UDC to place community facilities sum in interest a/c and return unexpended sum on 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of receipt from developers.</p>	<p>specific purposes stated in the Agreement</p>
£150,000	<p>Charles Church Bellrope Meadows, Thaxted development. Funding received in 2007/8.</p>	<p>Off site provision of affordable housing within ten years of date of the agreement</p>	<p>This sum had been intended to support the funding of the homeless hostel, Manor Road, Stansted, but alternative arrangements involving the conversion of existing stock in Molehill Green were funded from the HRA. This sum is now earmarked for the redevelopment of Holloway Crescent, Leaden Roding.</p>
£106.446.13	<p>Woodlands Park, Great Dunmow</p> <p>£116,363.75 received 2008/9 and £20,825 received 2009/10</p>	<p>Landscape commuted sum</p> <p>Sum drawn down to pay for equipping of playground</p>	<p>Sum is to pay for landscape maintenance</p>

	£30,742.62 drawn down 2009/10		
£41,472	Felsted School Ingrams, Felsted  Agreement to provide affordable housing contribution	Off site affordable housing provision to be expended within 5 years of first occupation	This sum is now earmarked for the redevelopment of Holloway Crescent, Leaden Roding.
£32,865	Bell College Saffron Walden  (Crabtrees, Countryside Properties' development)		Sum for remedial works to the playing fields in lieu of obligation to provide pitches to a suitable standard
£19,887	Fritch Green	£9518.16 and £7000 received in 2007/8 for community facilities  £2,899.20 drawn down in 2008/9  £4,100.80 drawn down in 2009/10  £10,368.97 received in 2010	Sum is allocated to the specific purposes in the agreement
£18,149	Dunmow Eastern sector		Sum represents outstanding balance after £38,000 contribution made to heart of Dunmow project