

**HOUSING BOARD held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.00pm on 30 AUGUST 2011**

Present:- Councillors K Mackman, J Menell, D Perry, V Ranger, J Redfern and D Sadler.

Tenant Forum representatives: David Parish and Angela Hutton.

Officers in attendance: Jack Burnham (Housing Enabling and Development Officer); Maggie Cox (Democratic Services Officer), Stephen Joyce (Assistant Chief Executive – Finance), Martin Ling (Interim Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager), Roz Millership (Divisional Head: Housing and Environmental Services), and Judith Snares (Housing Options/Homelessness Manager).

HB1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that Councillor V Ranger be elected Chairman of the Board for the forthcoming year.

HB2 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Barker, J Freeman, J Loughlin, D Morson and S Sproul (Tenants Forum).

Councillor Ranger declared a personal interest as a council tenant.

HB3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Housing Initiatives Working Group held on 3 March 2011 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HB4 TERMS OF REFERENCE

Members noted the terms of reference of the Board and how it would fit within the decision making structure of the authority. The Head of Housing and Environmental Services explained its areas of responsibility and the various strategies that it would need to consider. The Board was not a decision making body but would consider issues in detail and make recommendations to Cabinet.

Councillor Redfern commented on the Housing Regulation Panel which was to be established to monitor housing standards and performance and would be made up of council tenants. She asked for district members help in finding volunteers for this role in their ward areas.

HB5

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 30 YEAR BUSINESS PLAN 2012/13 – 2042/43

The Assistant Chief Executive – Finance presented an initial report on proposals to reform the Housing Revenue Account with the withdrawal of the Housing Subsidy System from 1 April next year. He explained how the existing system operated. There had been much opposition to the system which was seen as unfair, as the council was required to give to the Government a portion of its income from Council house rents and services. The new proposal was effectively for Authorities to buy out of the system, to make a one off up front payment, and take on and service this debt for approximately 30 years. It was expected that the loan on the debt payments would be less than the amount previously paid in housing subsidy. This revenue saving to the HRA could be used for stock improvement, redevelopment or other housing related matters.

In conjunction with its consultants the council had developed an HRA 30 year business plan which was attached to the report. It sought to identify the financial position under both the current and proposed scenarios. An initial estimate of the debt was £86.2m, the exact amount would not be clarified before December 2011 but before then foundations for borrowing would need to be put in place.

It was explained that the role of the Housing Board would be to establish the priorities for the service. The Cabinet would decide how to fund the debt and over what time period. Once the final figures were published the matter would be considered by Housing Board, Cabinet and then ratified by Full Council.

David Parish said that Tenants Forum was fully behind the new proposal as it appeared to be the best way of maintaining and improving the Council's housing stock. He asked if the presentation made today could be given at the next tenants' meeting on 12 September.

HB6

HOUSING REVENUE AND CAPITAL EXPENDITURE 2011/2012 TO 2020/2021

The Divisional Head of Housing and Environmental Health presented a table of projected capital and revenue expenditure for the next 20 years. It took as its basis the 2009 stock condition survey and tried to even out expenditure over the years. Behind each of the figures was a detailed programme of work which was available for members to see if requested.

She reported that legal issues were still being considered in relation to the project for the installation of PV panels on Council property. David Parish asked if there could be an update on the progress of this scheme to the next Tenants Forum meeting.

Councillor Menell asked for an update on the sustainable house in Wendens Ambo.

HB7

NEW AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

The Board received a report, which set out the affordable housing development programme for the period 2010 – 2014. It was noted that despite a dip in last year's performance the Council was likely to meet its ongoing target of 100 new dwellings a year. The Housing Enabling and Development Officer explained the change in the way in which the affordable housing programme was to be funded and the proposed changes in the rent regime. New affordable homes were also being funded through S106 agreements and through the Growth Area Fund.

In answer to a question, Councillor Menell was given details of the exception sites included within the programme.

The Divisional Head of Housing and Environmental Health informed the Board that a decision would need to be taken regarding proposals for some of the Council's sheltered properties where there were high void rates.

Officers would have to consult further with tenants on the various options for the sites. It was AGREED that this should commence immediately and a report be brought to the next meeting of the Board.

HB8

HOUSING POLICY DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

The Interim Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager presented a report which outlined the recent developments on housing policy and strategy. Attached to the report was an action plan which set out the various policy areas and dates for completion. This would be updated and circulated for each Board meeting. The Council's response would be formulated and delivered over the next 3 years and a new Housing Strategy would be produced in 2012 covering all areas set out in the action plan.

Members asked questions about stock disposal and changes in the rent regime. Members were assured that all new policies would be considered by the Board.

HB9

HOUSING OPTIONS/HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

The Housing Options/Homelessness manager presented a report which updated progress with the online application process and the change to the allocations policy from a points based system to a banding system. The change to an online application process had involved a lot of work for the section but all those previously registered had now been contacted and those that have re-registered have been assessed under the new banding system. A large number of new applications were also being processed. Cllr Perry praised the way that the process had been dealt with and thanked the team for their hard work.

Members noted that there had been an increase in the number of homeless cases and some people had been placed in bed and breakfast accommodation which was not a satisfactory solution.

It was AGREED that underused Council sheltered stock could be used to provide extra emergency temporary accommodation.

HB10 SUPPORTING PEOPLE PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Interim Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager presented a report which set out the recent changes in the way that care for vulnerable people was being administered and delivered across the district in conjunction with Essex County Council. These changes were proposed because of the reduction in funding from Central Government and the removal of the ring fence for supporting people's services as well as a desire to provide services consistently across the County. Further consultation on these changes was expected in the Autumn and the Board would be kept advised of any developments.

HB11 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Divisional Head of Housing and Environmental Health informed the Board that the Council had met the Respect Standards for ASB in Housing Management.

HB12 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

The next meetings of the Board were agreed as follows, all at **2.00pm** in the Council offices, Saffron Walden

28 September 2011
20 October 2011
23 November 2011

The meeting ended at 9.00pm.