

**HOUSING BOARD held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 2.00pm on 9 MAY 2012**

Present:- Councillor V Ranger – Chairman.
Councillors S Barker, J Freeman, J Loughlin, K Mackman, J Menell, J Redfern and D Sadler.

Tenant Forum representatives: Mr D Parish and Mr S Sproul.

Officers in attendance: M Cox (Democratic Services Officer), P Evans (Housing Business & Performance Manager), R Millership (Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services), J Snares (Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager), S Robinson (Housing Enabling and Development Officer) and S Wood (Planning and Housing Policy Manager).

HB47 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

An apology for absence was received from Councillor D Morson.

Councillor Ranger declared a personal interest as a council tenant.
Councillor Freeman declared a personal interest as his son lived in a Hastoe Housing Association property.
Councillor Sadler declared a personal interest as he lived in a Hastoe Housing Association Property.

HB48 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2012 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HB49 WEST ESSEX TENANCY STRATEGY

Kirsty Jenkins, from Jenkinsduval Housing Consultants gave a presentation on the West Essex Tenancy Strategy. The strategy was to be prepared by January 2013 and covered Uttlesford, Epping Forest and Harlow districts in line with the existing Memorandum of Understanding. Essentially it set out the Councils' position on flexible tenure / fixed term tenancies and would provide guidance for Housing Associations. Within the strategy each council could set its own policies and each local authority would decide whether the strategy would apply to their own housing stock.

The strategy would be based on local need and set out whether it supported fixed term tenancies, and if so under what circumstances. It would also explain how the tenancies would be brought to an end and the support for tenants during this process.

The Board was advised of the advantages of fixed term tenure. This was mainly in terms of meeting housing need at the time it was needed,

enabling the Council to make best use of its stock and having the ability to move tenants on where a social housing tenancy was no longer appropriate. The disadvantages were largely around concerns about sustainability & whether tenants would put down roots in their community.

The presentation explained the criteria that could be used to determine whether a tenancy would continue after the term period (ie 5 or 10 years). There would also be some particular circumstances where it was expected that a tenancy would continue and these would need to be agreed by the member authority.

The draft strategy was currently under development and members' views were sought at this stage. There would be a formal consultation with registered providers and stakeholders during June, it would then be put before the member authorities for agreement.

Members of the Board expressed some concern about the criteria that could be used in this process, particularly in terms of the tenants' financial position. It was explained that it was up to each authority to decide the criteria to be included in the guidance for the registered providers and if it wished to, it could omit the criteria relating to a tenant's financial position.

In answer to members' questions it was confirmed that the new arrangements would only apply to new tenancies. It was also noted that an estimate of 95% of tenancies would continue after the fixed term period. However, it was important to give guidance to the Housing Associations before they set their own policies.

The Tenant's Forum representatives said that in principle they supported the introduction of fixed terms tenancies as long as the implications were made clear to the tenants from the outset. It was understood that a key part of the process was to offer advice to tenants who were nearing the end of their tenancy and it was suggested that a full housing options review should be carried out at this time.

Councillor Sadler was concerned about the possibility of introducing fixed term tenancies in Uttlesford. He was assured that councillors would make the final decision on whether the strategy would apply to the Council's own housing stock.

Councillor Redfern said she understood the reservations about introducing fixed term tenancies, but in the current economic climate the Council could not afford to have under occupancy and had to make best use of its housing stock in order meet the demand for housing.

The Chairman thanked Kirsty Jenkins for attending the meeting.

HB50

WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting, Paula Evans the new Housing Business and Performance Manager. She would be responsible for all

areas of housing performance and would be setting up the new Tenant's Regulatory Panel.

HB51 **MEAD COURT**

The Housing Board received a report following recent meetings of the Mead Court Task Group where the proposal for redeveloping Mead Court had been discussed. The Task Group had considered the various options for redevelopment/refurbishment and had considered a local authority new build scheme to be the preferred option. £2.6m had been made available in HRA Business Plan for this purpose. The group had looked at the site and what could be provided, taking account of the housing need in the area and an indicative plan had been prepared. Proposal for the scheme would now be worked up and a business plan prepared.

It was confirmed that the existing tenants had been kept informed during this process and were supportive of the proposal. Discussions would continue to be held with the parish council.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that resources be committed to drawing up proposals for a Local Authority New Build Scheme and that a business case be prepared for consideration as the preferred option for the redevelopment of Mead Court.

HB52 **AFFORDABLE HOUSING UPDATE**

The Board received the updated report on the provision of affordable dwellings. The Council had a target to build 100 affordable houses a year. The final figure for 2011/12 was 111 dwellings and for 2012/13 it was anticipated that 134 dwellings would be provided.

It was reported that the phase 2 of the Leaden Roding development would commence at the end of May. David Parish said that Hatfield Heath Parish Council, in association with Hastoe Housing Association, was planning to build 14 affordable properties in the village.

Councillor Menell asked for information on the parish exemption sites that were in the pipeline to be included in the report for the next meeting.

HB53 **HOUSING STRATEGY AND CONFERENCE**

The Board noted that the current Housing Strategy was now out of date and the Affordable and Homeless Strategies were nearing the end of their life. These would now be included in one Strategy to be published in September, which would set out the Council's priorities for the next 3 years, and help inform the new local plan.

As part of the process it was noted that there would be two consultation events

4 July – Conference for key partners and Members

5 July – An event for members of the public.

HB54 **PREVENTING REPOSSESSIONS FUND**

The Board was advised that the Council had been awarded £30k from the CLG from the Preventing Repossessions Fund. Although this money had not been ring-fenced it had been included within the Homelessness budget. Discussions had taken place with the CAB to use £5/6K of this money to develop the debt counselling service that it offered to tenants by training additional councillors. This service was not be provided by the District Council but was key to the prevention of repossessions.

In answer to questions it was confirmed that although the head office of the Uttlesford CAB was in Saffron Walden there were local offices in Thaxted, Stansted and Great Dunmow. It was also emphasised that this sum would be allocated specifically for debt counselling and there would be reports back on what had been achieved with the additional funds.

HB55 **RIGHT TO BUY (RTB) UPDATE**

The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Health reported that the changes to legislation had been confirmed and the RTB discount had been raised to £75k. To help councils manage this situation the Government had put in place measures to enable local authorities to retain a greater proportion of RTB capital receipts, enabling debt repayment and funding of new affordable housing. Properties sold under RTB would be replaced by new affordable housing on a 1 for 1 basis. The Council had been asked to make a formal agreement with the Government that the balance of RTB receipts retained locally would be used for new housing. The Council would be required to add other resources, so that the proportion of spend on new build funded from RTB receipts was 30% or less.

On the whole it was considered that these changes would benefit the Council and provide an opportunity to provide more affordable housing, although it would require the revenue headroom to be pushed more toward the redevelopment of houses. There was an optimum number of sales of around 15 – 20 per year. Any sales in excess of this might affect the Council's ability to deliver the housing improvements set out in the business plan. It was too early to predict the level of right to buy sales, but the situation would continue to be closely monitored and reported to the Board.

HB56 **HRA BUSINESS PLAN**

The Board was informed of a number of proposals/ priorities for action for future use of the revenue headroom within the HRA Business Plan. The proposals reflected the housing requirements within the LDF and included plans to provide for extra care accommodation, mental health schemes and schemes for vulnerable adults and those with learning disabilities. There

was also a need for bungalow accommodation for elderly people to be provided on S106 sites.

A number of the proposals related to energy efficiency and the Council's Energy Efficiency Officer would attend the next meeting to give further details of these projects.

HB57

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meetings would be held on Monday 9 July at 10.00am and Monday 10 September at 2.00 pm.

The meeting ended at 4.00pm.