

HOUSING BOARD held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 10.00am on 9 JULY 2012

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

Also present: Ms A French – Energy Efficiency Officer, Braintree District Council.

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

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

HB1 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Redfern and D Sadler.

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.

HB2 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 May 2012 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HB3 BUSINESS ARISING

Minute HB52 – Affordable Housing Update

The Chairman referred to Councillor Menell's request for information on the parish exemption sites which were due to be reported. The Housing Enabling and Development Officer said that this had not yet been done.

Councillor Barker asked for an update on the Leaden Roding development. The Housing Enabling and Development Officer reported that there had been a number of issues relating to heating systems and also asbestos delays but progress was being made and demolition should start in two to three weeks.

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT OUTTURN 2011/2012

The Housing Business and Performance Manager presented a briefing note outlining the details of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the financial year 2011/12. A budget deficit of £101,000 approximately had been forecast, the actual deficit was £147,000 approximately. The result had produced a HRA working balance of £649,000 approximately as at 31 March 2012, which was above the target balance level of £515,000 and provided additional financial flexibility to meet the future challenges. The only significant variance for the account was the need to provide for additional revenue contributions to the capital repairs programme, therefore a planned contribution to reserves would not take place. The Account's outturn had no ongoing impact on the financial ability to deliver the requirements of the HRA Business Plan. She reported that there was no ongoing impact and was happy with the outturn.

The Housing Business and Performance Manager also reported that the Housing capital spend in 2011/12 was approximately £3 million which had resulted in an increased spend on the forecast of £384,000. The additional spend was attributable to the following operational actions:

Central Heating - £186,000 – Boiler Replacement programme brought forward and replacement with higher efficiency boilers.

Voids programme - £166,000 – Higher proportion of void properties returned in poor condition resulting in a higher level of spend.

Bathroom and Kitchen replacements - £177,000 – Replacement programme for Void properties brought forward as a result of issues identified above.

The financial impact of the additional costs which were identified had been assisted by cost reductions (£142,000) in other programmed work as a result of improved contract management.

The Housing Business and Performance Manager said that a Cabinet report had been submitted and that the Statement of Accounts was available on the website. She also said that she had regular meetings with the Accountants.

Councillor Barker asked what the target balance levels were and the Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services answered that the minimum working balances required were £500,000.

The Housing Business and Performance Manager reported on Right to Buy feedback and said that there had been an increase in the number of applications and enquiries but these were not resulting in sales. Councillor Barker asked whether any contact had been made with mortgage providers. The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services replied that the Council were not permitted to recommend any particular company and could only advise that purchasers go to reputable lenders. Mr Sproul suggested setting up a scheme whereby the Council could advance mortgages. The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services said that this would be complicated to organise and would involve a lot of work.

HRA 30 YEAR BUSINESS PLAN

A report had been circulated to Members outlining the Business Plan Priorities. The Housing Revenue Account Capital programme for 2012-17 included home energy efficiency investment of £300,000 per annum to reflect priorities identified in the HRA Business Plan. The Council's Energy Officer had researched a number of methods for the Council to improve average energy efficiency to reduce fuel costs for residents using the budget and grants available. The report provided information on options looked at by the Energy Officer and set out the case for the Council to work with an insulation installer to secure CERT (Carbon Emission Reduction Target) funding and ECO (Energy Company Obligation) pilot project funding from an energy company, to support a project to install external cladding on selected solid wall properties in the Council's housing stock. The purpose was to improve the energy efficiency of the Council's worst performing housing, tackle fuel poverty, reduce carbon emissions and raise the energy profile of the stock. The proposed project would be able to draw in funding from the closing stages of the CERT scheme as well as the ECO (Energy Company Obligation – the successor to CERT) pilot project funding. Projects had to be allocated funding by October 2012 and to be completed by March 2013.

The Council were considering four options for this project. Properties that were heated by oil attracted a greater level of grant funding under CERT, however new Energy Company Obligation (ECO) pilot funding attracted a similar amount of grant funding for gas heated properties. It was therefore proposed to seek funding under both streams to maximise the level of external support. The figures below are the result of Aran Services (a potential partner in this project) applying for CERT funding and ECO funding for our properties:

No of solid wall properties	Total project cost	External funding (CERT / ECO)	Estimated maximum UDC funding (these prices are subject to change)
Option A) All the Council's solid wall properties: 450 properties (335 gas / 115 oil)	£2,342,000	£781,000	£ 1,561,000
Option B) Selected solid wall properties: 215 properties (100 gas / 115 oil)	£1,652,000	£722,000	£930,000
Option C) 115 oil properties	£752,000	£208,000	£544,000
Option D) 60 oil properties (worse performing)	432,000	£132,000	£300,000

Dependant upon the option chosen, on project completion an invoice will be submitted to the Council for its contribution to the project. The final cost to the Council figure would depend on the number of properties completed within the availability of funding timeframe. It should be noted that a greater number of properties insulated would attract a greater level of funding. On completion of the project a report would be submitted to Housing Board.

Anna French, Energy Efficiency Officer from Braintree District Council, went through the report with Members. She also referred to the number of projects mentioned at the last Tenant Forum meeting.

Councillor Barker considered that the projects would be expensive and said that a lot of money could be lost if properties were improved and then sold under the Right to Buy scheme. The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services said that the only the worst performing properties would be improved. She said that the improvements would add value to the properties and did not consider that the possibility of a property being sold to a tenant in the future was reason enough for not doing the work now.

Councillor Menell referred to the workshops held at the Housing Strategy conference which was held last week. She asked that the recommendations and suggestions made by Members should be noted and followed up. The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services assured her that all suggestions would be considered.

A discussion took place on ways of providing tenants with cheaper oil for heating.

The Chairman asked a question concerning the grant deadline. Ms French said that the date for allocated funding for projects was October 2012 with completion by March 2013. It was then

RECOMMENDED that a request for funding for the installation of external cladding on up to 115 Council properties, subject to confirmation that the HRA business plan can meet the Right to Buy match funding, be made to the next Cabinet meeting in August.

HB6 **NEW AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT**

The Housing Enabling and Development Officer reported that the target for new affordable housing was 100 per year. This had been exceeded so far this year with 134 properties.

HB7 **HOUSING POLICY**

The Planning and Housing Policy Manager went through the Housing Policy Development Action Plan which had been circulated to Members.

Concerning Gypsies and Travellers pitch provision the Planning and Housing Policy Manager said that there was a call for sites in October 2012 and study work and then consultation would be carried out.

Members referred to landowners offering land for affordable housing which the Council could utilise. The Chairman suggested that a call could be made through parish councils for parcels of land which could be investigated and used for affordable housing.

Councillor Menell asked a question regarding rural exception sites. The Housing Enabling and Development Officer said that a leaflet was being prepared and she was working closely with parish councils on this. She said would ensure that a report was included with the minutes (*attached*).

With regard to the Older Persons Housing Strategy in the report, the Chairman said that overheating should also be considered when providing housing for older persons. Mr Sproul referred to the number of bungalows which only had one door to enter by and he thought that this situation should be looked into. The Planning and Housing Policy Manager said that there should be a design guide for bungalows.

The Chairman said that the workshops and strategy sessions at the Housing Strategy Conference had been excellent and worthwhile and had raised a number of questions.

HB8

MEAD COURT

The Housing Enabling and Development Officer reported that the working group had not had a meeting since the last Housing Board. A tendering process had to be entered into with regard to producing the plans as the Council did not currently employ an in-house architect. A specification was being prepared at the moment and preliminary drawings undertaken.

Members discussed this situation and the Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services said that Officers were currently exploring the possibility of the Council employing an architect. It was therefore

RECOMMENDED that a report be submitted to the next Cabinet meeting to request the recruitment of an in-house architect to progress new build schemes.

HB9

HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager updated Members on the current situation with regard to homelessness. In the first quarter of the year, 16 applications had been received. There was increasing pressure for emergency bed and breakfast accommodation with some cases being

accommodated in Harlow. All other temporary units, including Mead Court were currently full.

Councillor Morson referred to the hardship fund and suggested that in the first instance proposals for its use should be brought back to the next meeting so that firm proposal on its management could be decided on and taken to Cabinet

RECOMMENDED that proposals for the hardship fund be prepared and brought back to the Housing Board.

HB10 **TENANCY STRATEGY**

The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager presented a consultation draft of the West Essex Tenancy Strategy to Members. It was proposed to submit the document to Cabinet to accept the West Essex Tenancy Strategy as a working document.

RECOMMENDED that the West Essex Tenancy Strategy document be submitted to Cabinet for approval.

HB11 **ALLOCATIONS POLICY AND CONDITIONS OF TENANCY**

The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager reported on the new statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities. The guidance could make it easier to move existing social tenants to more suitable accommodation and also encouraged authorities to make use of the existing flexibilities within the allocation legislation to ensure that social homes go to people who need and deserve them the most. Members could also consider giving priority to working households or those making a positive contribution to the community.

The main welfare changes affecting tenants were discussed including reforms to the housing benefit system and implications of the proposed 'bedroom tax'.

A discussion took place on the subject of tenants who were in receipt of benefits downsizing to smaller properties. Those judged to have one extra bedroom could lose 14% of housing benefit a week and those with two or more extra rooms could lose 25% if they did not move to a smaller property. The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services explained that the council's current bedroom criteria for housing allocations is more generous than the criteria being introduced under welfare reforms and there was a strong argument for bringing it into line with the housing benefit restrictions. If the bedroom criteria remained as it was it could encourage people to move into properties they could not afford.

Future changes in the law for the Armed Forces were also discussed as the housing policy would need to be changed to give them preferential treatment.

The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager also mentioned the Localism Act changes to succession rights for secure tenants that became law on 1 April 2012. Under the new Act the right to succession to family members has been repealed and there was a need to have a new local succession policy in place if the council wanted more favourable succession rights. This issue had been discussed by the tenant forum who were in favour of succession rights to tenants children who had been living in the property for at least 3 years and where the property is under occupied they would be made an offer of suitable alternative accommodation.

Councillor Morson considered that there was no great need to completely change the allocations policy as it had only recently been re-written. It was then

RECOMMENDED that the following policy modifications be submitted to Cabinet:

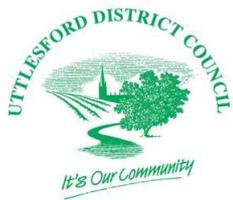
- (a) amend the bedroom criteria of the allocations policy to reflect welfare reforms
- (b) amend conditions of tenancy to give more favourable succession tenancy rights to include children of tenants if they have been resident in the property for more than three years

HB12

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on Monday 10 September at 2.00 pm.

The meeting ended at 12.28pm.



Rural Exception Sites

This paper sets out the current position for the delivery affordable housing on Rural Exception sites within the district:

Parish	Housing Association	No. of properties	On Site
Arkesden	Hastoe	4	No

- **Schemes with Planning Permission**

- **Schemes with a proposed site for development but no planning permission**

Parish	Housing Association	No. of properties	On Site?
Hatfield Heath	Hastoe	14	N/A
Manuden	English Rural (ERHA)	4	N/A
Gt. & Lt. Chesterford	Hastoe	14	N/A
Newport	Hastoe	34	N/A
Chrishall	Hastoe	4	N/A

- **Parishes with an identified housing need but no proposed site**

Parish	Housing Association	No. of properties	On Site?
Felsted	English Rural (ERHA)	7	N/A
Hatfield Broad Oak	English Rural (ERHA)	10	N/A
Quenden & Rickling	English Rural (ERHA)	4	N/A
Clavering	Not yet allocated	9	N/A
Gt Hallingbury	Not yet allocated	6	N/A
Lt Hallingbury	Not yet allocated	16	N/A

Radwinter	Not yet allocated	5	N/A

- **Parish Council's approached regarding carrying out a Housing Need Survey**

Parish	Housing Association	No. of properties	On Site?
Wendens Ambo	N/A	Unknown	N/A
Thaxted	N/A	Unknown	N/A
Sewards End	N/A	Unknown	N/A