

**HOUSING BOARD held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 2.00pm on 13 JUNE 2013**

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

Tenant Forum representative: Mr D Parish.

Officers in attendance:, M Cox (Democratic Services Officer), R Crockford (Housing Asset Manager), M Donaldson (Accountancy Manager), P Evans (Housing Business & Performance Manager), D Malins (Interim Housing Strategy Manager), R Millership (Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services), J Snares (Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager).

HB56 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Menell, D Morson, and J Redfern.

Councillor Ranger declared a non-pecuniary interest as a council tenant. Councillor Barker declared her interest as a member of ECC in matters relating to joint working with the County Council.

HB57 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2013 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HP58 REGULATORY PANEL UPDATE

The Housing Business and Improvement Manager presented a progress report on the Housing Tenant's Regulatory Panel. She reminded members of the background to forming the Panel, its responsibilities and current work plan. The report had been considered by a recent meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

Mrs Daphne Cornell attended the meeting as the Chairman of the Regulatory Panel. She explained that since the Panel had been recruited in November it had met on three occasions, supported by an independent consultant to provide scrutiny training and guidance through the first review. The Panel had established two roles, analysts who reviewed processes and analysed performance data and inspectors whose role was to conduct work and site inspections. The Panel would then conduct a formal service review and put forward recommendations to the Tenants' Forum and the Housing Board.

The group was initially focusing on void properties and would shortly be meeting to put forward ideas for improvement.

The next stage was for the group to set a forward work programme and to decide whether it still required the assistance of the consultant.

The Housing Business and Improvement Manager commended the progress made by the Panel and the commitment shown by the members who were all volunteers. Mrs Cornell said she was pleased at the positive response from the tenants who were representative of all areas of the district.

HP59 WELFARE BENEFITS REFORMS

The Board discussed the impact of the introduction of the recent welfare reforms. Officers said that there had been an increased number of queries from tenants regarding the spare room subsidy. Early indications were that the level of rent arrears was increasing, but this would become clearer when comparable data was available in the coming months.

It was agreed that this matter would be a standing item on future agenda.

HB60 ADAPTATIONS AND DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT

The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services reported that there was currently a delay with obtaining Occupational Therapy (OT) assessments from ECC. This had led to a large backlog of cases waiting for assessments. She suggested that the Council could employ its own OT to be funded by the HRA underspend, initially on a temporary basis. This would enable more timely assessments which would help to ensure that tenants in need received appropriate accommodation and at the time that it was needed.

It was AGREED that a proposal be prepared for Cabinet approval.

HB61 DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

i) Holloway Crescent

The project was on target to be completed by the middle of July and the ribbon cutting ceremony would be held on 25 July. In answer to a member's question it was clarified that the area for car parking would be as per the planning consent and 50% of the allocations would be to residents with a local connection.

ii) Mead Court

Planning consent for the project had been granted on 5 June 2013. The next stage was to work up the full design programme, then the detailed specification and cost assessment. The work was expected to commence in the 1st week November and the construction would take about a year. Officers would update the parish council on progress with the scheme.

An objection by a neighbouring resident had been raised at the Planning Committee. In response, the Housing Asset Manager confirmed that there was no issue with the party wall and appropriate measures would be put in place to ensure that there was no damage to the fence.

Councillor Barker said that the progress with these housing schemes was a good news story and suggested that a presentation could be made at a future area forum meeting.

iii) Other development

The Board was updated on the study being undertaken by a consultant on the feasibility of development on council owned sites. A number of sites were being looked at and initial designs put together. Progress would be reported to future meeting.

HB62

HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

The Board received a report setting out the homelessness statistics for 2011/12 to 2012/13. It was noted that the level of homelessness had increased over the previous 12 months. All the temporary accommodation was currently full and it had been necessary to use bed and breakfast accommodation. It was noted that provision would need to be made to replace the temporary units currently being used at Mead Court. The housing options team was being called on more frequently to give advice to tenants. It was anticipated that the problems would increase with the welfare changes and the lack of suitably sized affordable properties within the rented sector.

A further report would be made to the next meeting.

HB63

HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Housing Asset Manager circulated the 1st draft of the Asset Management Plan. This would be circulated to all members of the Board inviting comments by 31 July.

HB64 **SHELTERED SCHEME UPDATE**

Further to the recommendation at the last meeting the Housing Asset Manager reported that a consultant had been commissioned to carry out an in depth review of the 5 worst performing sheltered schemes. Consultation events had been held with residents at these locations. A more detailed report from the consultants would be submitted to a future meeting.

HB65 **HOUSING STRATEGY UPDATE**

The Interim Housing Strategy Manager reported progress on the Housing Strategy Action Plan which set out the housing priorities for 2012 -15.

He reported that all the priorities were progressing and updated the Board on the following areas:-

- HCA bid for extra care schemes - the outcome should be known by the end of the month.
- Learning disability scheme – a positive meeting had been held with East Thames HA and the project was progressing.
- A landlord forum was planned for September. Members input would be welcomed on areas to be discussed.
- The Housing Strategy conference would be held in October.

HB66 **HRA BUSINESS PLAN – ACTION PLAN PROGRSS**

The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services reported progress of the HRA Business Plan programme for 2012/13. Despite slippage on some of the energy efficiency projects, which were due to complete by October, all the planned work had been progressed, which had been a huge task. The replacement alarm systems for the sheltered units had been delayed due to staff changes but would be completed in this financial year.

In answer to a question it was reported that in 2012/13 there had been 9 right to buy completions and there was expected to be a similar number in this financial year. For the performance of the business plan the optimum maximum was 10 right to buy sales per annum. It was noted that the capital receipts would be held for affordable housing projects.

The Assistant Director explained that the HRA headroom would enable the council to invest in long term projects, including new build and regeneration works, as opposed to short term fixes. Investment in the stock had already resulted in savings in other areas including a reduction in response repairs and fewer voids. It was becoming clear that increased investment in the housing stock was a catalyst for improvements in other areas of the housing service.

HB67

PROGRAMME OUTTURN 2012/13

The Accountancy Manager gave the 2012/13 outturn report on the Housing Revenue Account. This was the first year of operation of the account following the self-financing reforms. The original HRA budget was for an in-year surplus of £2.714m of which £2.7m had been allocated as 'headroom' to fund the business plan. The final working balance of the HRA was £0.680 above the target level of balance of 0.495. The Accountancy Manager explained the key issues in the accounts including details of the favourable and adverse variances. She also gave details of the HRA reserves. It was noted that there was now £800,000 within the reserves for future development schemes.

HB68

OTHER BUSINESS

The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager reported that the Gateway authorities and Uttlesford DC had now agreed on two projects to be funded from the £362,000 DCLG grant. The projects were for outreach services for rough sleepers and the acquisition of private rented accommodation for single homeless people.

She also mentioned a joint housing and community's road show to be held at Mountfitchet Green Stansted which would be attended by partner agencies offering residents advice on a range of services.

The Housing Asset Manager reported on a recent HQN review of the depot responsive repairs service. Despite some positive points the review raised a number of performance and productivity issues and changes had been recommended. The final report would be circulated to members when available.

The Housing Business & Performance Manager said that she would bring the corporate and local performance indicators in relation to the housing service to the next meeting, when the Board could decide which areas it wished to monitor on a quarterly basis.

The meeting ended at 4.30pm.