

**HOUSING BOARD held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 2pm on 22 JULY 2014**

Present: Councillor V Ranger (Chairman)
Councillors J Loughlin, D Perry and J Redfern

Tenant Forum Representative: Mrs D Cornell and Mr D Parish

Officers: S Baxter (Housing Enabling Officer), P Evans (Housing Business and Performance Manager), E Fellows (Accountant), F Gardiner (Anti-Social Behaviour and Housing Management Co-Ordinator), D Malins (Housing Development Manager), R Millership (Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services), A Rees (Democratic Services Support Officer), J Snares (Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager) and M Wilson (Energy Officer).

HB1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Dean, M Felton and J Menell.

Councillor Ranger and Mr Parish both declared a non-pecuniary interest as tenants of the Council.

HB2 MINUTES

The minutes were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HB3 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS

Members received information from the Energy Officer about the modification of housing to improve their environmental efficiency.

The Energy Officer said the Council had started a programme of solid wall insulation, as well as one for timber wall insulation. 57 properties had been completed to date. The Council had also begun a scheme which replaced oil boilers with air source heat pumps. As the heat pumps used electricity not oil, the cost was spread over the course of a year.

In most instances there had been no issue with noise from heat pumps. Where there had been noise issues, steps had been taken to ensure that noise levels were reduced. There had also been a tenant liaison scheme to ensure residents knew how to use the pumps properly.

In response to questions from members, the Energy Officer said although utilising solar energy was important, the priority was to reduce bills by ensuring that properties were properly insulated.

Much of the Council's stock was aging and energy costs varied significantly as many properties were solid brick. It was imperative to ensure parity of energy costs across the Council's housing stock. There was an anticipated saving in some existing HRA capital budgets and the money could be reallocated to the energy budget to carry out more external insulation schemes. The Tenant Forum had discussed this at their meeting and were in agreement with any budget underspends being used on housing improvement schemes that benefitted tenants such as external wall cladding. Members agreed with this proposal.

AGREED increase in numbers of properties in the external wall cladding programme this year, to be financed from existing budgets/underspends

HB4 HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager said that two housing allocations workshops had been held in the previous week; one for members and one for the Tenants Forum/Tenant Regulatory Panel. Questions would be placed on the website and also sent to the Citizens Panel as part of the public consultation. Feedback would be used to inform the new draft policy which would be brought back to the Housing Board in October.

HB5 DRAFT ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY AND PROCEDURE

The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager said the new draft Anti-Social Behaviour Policy detailed how the Council would deal with complaints of anti-social behaviour. It also defined what constituted anti-social behaviour. Because of the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014, the Council had reviewed its Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and Procedures and was ready to begin a period of public consultation. A second draft would be submitted for approval after the publication of the Government's final guidance document and the Essex Case Review guidance.

The Anti-Social Behaviour and Housing Management Co-Ordinator said that the changes would mean that powers would be condensed and easier to use. The community trigger would require co-ordination throughout Essex, not just Uttlesford. The draft policy would extend what was meant by nearby vicinity from outside a complainant's house to nearby towns.

AGREED that the Council's draft Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and Procedure would be distributed for public consultation.

HB6 DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

(i) Mead Court Progress (Verbal Update)

The Housing Development Manager said the first phase was currently behind schedule due to bad weather experienced in February. Despite this progress had been good and the second phase was still expected to be completed on schedule.

A pre-application meeting for the Catons Lane development was to take place on 24 July.

(ii) Sheltered Schemes – Reynolds Court

The Housing Development Manager said that the scheme had been identified as amongst the worst performing schemes in terms of physical attributes and high void levels. Two options were being proposed; a redevelopment or a remodel. The Scheme currently consisted of 31 units, 22 of which were bedsits and clearly outdated and 11 units were currently void. The scheme was in a good location within Newport and if the scheme were fit for purpose, demand would increase.

There were two options for the Scheme. Option 1 would reduce the number of units in the scheme from 31 to 21 and would not alter any of the communal layouts or address other issues. The estimated cost of this option was £1,568,000. Funding for this option had already been budgeted for in the HRA Business Plan.

The Housing Development Officer outlined option 2, the new build proposal. This would increase the number of units to 43 and would be a thermally efficient building and would also provide the following facilities:

- A new entrance lobby.
- A large scooter store.
- A hair and beauty salon.
- A large communal lounge with kitchen area.
- Two lifts.
- A courtyard garden area.
- Informal sitting areas.
- A well-being suite.
- Balconies for all one and two bedroom apartments.

The estimated cost of this option was £7,374,110. This cost took into account identified risk elements and the actual cost was likely to be lower than the estimate.

The Housing Development Officer said that the 19 existing sheltered housing tenants had been asked which of the options they preferred. 14 were in favour of option 2, 2 wanted no change to the accommodation and 3 had not responded.

In response to questions from members, the Housing Development Manager said that it was not possible to give timeframes for either option, however since option 2 would require planning permission, it would take longer to complete. Based on the cost of phasing construction at Mead Court, the

estimated cost of phasing construction for option 2 at Reynolds Court was about £300,000. The Council had explored the possibility of selling some of the flats to the private sector, but had come to the conclusion it was not currently in a position to do so. A cost of between £80,000 and £161,000, to obtain planning permission, would be required dependant on the option that was pursued. This had already been allocated in the HRA Business Plan.

Members agreed that it was important to provide supported accommodation that was suitable for the long term and that the Council should aim to increase its housing stock.

The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services informed members that costs up to £5m could be funded from the HRA business plan. Should the project exceed this amount additional funding would be required.

AGREED to recommend to Cabinet that:

- Option 2, the new build option, should be progressed.
- The site should be progressed to the planning application stage.

(iii) Sheltered Schemes – Hatherley Court

The Housing Development Manager said that the Scheme had been identified as performing poorly in terms of the physical attributes of individual flats. The Scheme consisted of 26 flats, all of which were one bedroom. 18 had poorly sized bedroom facilities and many had small kitchens. The common room was on the second floor and there was no easily identifiable entrance to the Scheme. However, it was a conservation site and overlooked the Common.

Officers had frequently met with tenants. Concept drawings had been developed by Ingleton Wood Architects and following a presentation on 25 June, feedback from tenants had been unanimously positive. The proposals included provision for the following:

- A new entrance lobby located in the current refuse area.
- A new external refuse area.
- The removal of one ground floor flat to provide a new communal lounge, conservatory and outdoor seating.
- An extension to provide two new flats.
- The remodelling of all flats to provide larger living areas, fully refurbished kitchens, wet rooms and Juliette balconies.
- The second floor common room would be fitted with Juliette balconies and sun pipes.
- A scooter store and charging points.
- The redecoration of all communal areas.

The estimated cost of the scheme was £1,699,223, this included design fees, all fit out costs, multi-phased development and the identification of risk elements. This had already been included in the HRA Business Plan.

In response to a question by Councillor Perry, the Housing Development Manager said that an asbestos survey was being undertaken. The new heating systems had been placed so that they would not interfere with any asbestos removal.

AGREED to recommend to Cabinet that the proposals to remodel Hatherley Court should be progressed to the planning application stage.

HB7 WELFARE REFORM UPDATE

The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager said that the figures were encouraging and that measures introduced appeared to be working well. Officers had worked with tenants affected offering advice and assistance. The number of people affected by the spare room subsidy in the first quarter of the current year was down from the fourth quarter of the previous year. The number of, and average value of arrears had also fallen.

Councillor Perry agreed that the figures were encouraging and thanked officers for their work.

The report was noted.

HB8 TENANT REGULATORY PANEL UPDATE

The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services said that the Tenant Regulatory Panel had recently undertaken an inspection of the processes that were followed when a property became void. Following the inspection, officers had developed an action plan to ensure the recommendations made were implemented.

Mrs Cornell remarked that she was pleased to see the Tenant Regulatory Panel was appreciated for the work it was undertaking.

The Housing Business and Performance Manager said that following the Housing Board's suggestion that ways to promote the Panel should be found, the Panel had been submitted for an award of which the winner would be announced in November.

The report was noted.

HB9 PRIVATE SECTOR HOMES (VERBAL UPDATE)

The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services said Cabinet had given approval for a compulsory purchase order for a property that had been vacant for over 10 years.

Officers had identified other properties where action would be appropriate and further requests would be made to Cabinet.

The Essex Landlord Accreditation Scheme would be launched in September.

HB10 HRA BUSINESS PLAN

The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services explained the position with the HRA budget and outturn. Programmes of work identified at the beginning of the five year business plan were progressing well. Options were being looked at/costed for when the five year period elapsed. The 2013/14 surplus of £318,000 had been earmarked for Sheltered Housing improvements.

The report was noted.

HB11 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Councillor Ranger announced that following his appointment to the Cabinet as the Executive Member for Communities and Partnerships, he would be stepping down as Chairman of the Housing Board once a deputy for Housing had been appointed.

Members congratulated him on his appointment to the Cabinet and extended their thanks to him for his work during his chairmanship of the Housing Board.

The meeting ended at 3.40pm.