

**HOUSING BOARD held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 10am on 30 JUNE 2015**

Present: Councillor M Felton (Chairman)
Councillors H Asker, A Dean, T Farthing, J Loughlin, S
Morris, A Mills, V Ranger, J Redfern and H Ryles.

Also present: Mrs Daphne Cornell and Mr Ernie Bottler (Tenants'
Forum Representatives).

Officers in attendance: S Baxter (Housing Enabling Officer), P Evans
(Housing Business and Performance Manager), R
Harborough (Director of Public Services), E Horner
(Specialist Accountant), R Millership (Assistant Director
Housing and Environmental Services), A Rees
(Democratic and Electoral Services Officer), G Smith
(Head of Environmental Health), J Snares (Housing
Needs and Landlord Services Manager), M Watts
(Principal Environmental Health Officer) and S Wood
(Housing and Planning Policy Manager).

HB1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from David Parish (Tenant Forum
Representative).

*Councillor Ranger declared a non-pecuniary interest as a tenant of the
Council.*

HB2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chairman signed the minutes of the meeting held on 27 January
2015 as a correct record.

HB3 MATTERS ARISING

Councillor Redfern, as the Cabinet Member for Housing and Economic
Development, welcomed the new Members of the Housing Board to
their first meeting and gave an overview of the objectives of the
housing board and outlined the main ongoing projects which the
Housing Board had helped to implement. She then gave an overview of
some of the key issues coming up.

Councillor Redfern explained that she felt one of the aims of the
Housing Board was to help develop a portfolio of schemes which would
be ready for development once funding became available.

HB4

HOUSING STRATEGY 2016-21

The Housing and Planning Policy Manager presented her report on the Housing Strategy to Members. She explained that the previous Housing Strategy was published in 2012 and set priorities for a three year period. The new Strategy would aim to set priorities for a five year period.

The first draft of the Strategy was brought to the Housing Board in January for discussion and it was agreed the consultation should be delayed until after the elections to allow new councillors an opportunity to comment on the Strategy. This meeting provided an opportunity for comment before the next draft of the Strategy was prepared in time for the next meeting of the Housing Board. There would then be a public consultation period before the final draft was put before Members for approval. It was anticipated the next Strategy would be in place by January 2016.

Councillor Dean queried what impact the expansion of Right to Buy would have on the Strategy and what could be included in the Strategy in order to mitigate any affects the potential expansion of Right to Buy could have.

In response, the Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services explained the Council was looking at the potential impact of any expansion to Right to Buy.

The report was noted.

HB5

HRA 2014-15 OUTTURN AND BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE

Members received a report from the Specialist Accountant on the HRA outturn and the Business Plan. She said in April 2012, the Localism Act 2011 introduced a new self-financing system for the HRA, in place of the old subsidy based system. As part of the transition to new system the Council made a one-off payment of £88.407 million to the Government, which was financed through a number of loans from the Public Works Loans Board.

The Specialist Accountant said the draft HRA outturn had produced an expected favourable variance. This was mainly due to slippage in projects including the Mead Court development and the method in which expenditure was profiled. The total investment in stock had been £8.31 million. There had been a higher number of Right to Buy sales than those estimated in the business plan.

Discussion moved onto the Council's exposure to its loans caused by Right to Buy. In response to Members, the Assistant Director Housing

and Environmental Services explained that the Government had made an assumption on the number of Right to Buy sales when the self-financing settlement had been calculated. If the amount of Right to Buy sales exceeded this number the Council did have some exposure to risk.

Councillor Dean queried the £3.4 million surplus as it appeared the money had not been spent. The Specialist Accountant again explained the surplus was slippage which had arisen from delays to developments. The rest was a result of projected profiling and had been allocated to projects.

The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services, in response to a question by Councillor Loughlin, explained that the contractor was liable for costs resulting from additional unforeseen works. Such costs were included in the contracts. The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services then responded to a question by Councillor Asker and explained the contractors had conducted thorough surveys and tests prior to the build and had been unlucky to miss the asbestos in the ground which had been left by a previous developer.

In response to a question by Councillor Loughlin, the Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager said the Council was responsible for the purchase of IT equipment that was installed in its internet cafes.

The report was noted.

HB6

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services said that the ongoing projects were as outlined by Cllr Redfern at the beginning of the meeting.

In response to a question by Councillor Dean about Manor Road, Stansted, The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services said the Council were currently trialling a solution at one of the flats. In reply to a follow up request by Councillor Dean, the Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services agreed to bring an update on Manor Road to the next meeting of the Housing Board.

Members discussed the potential development at St Johns Close in Saffron Walden. The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services explained the Council wasn't successful in its bid to buy back one of the two Right to Buy properties. Despite this it was still possible that the redevelopment could still take place, provided the Council was successful in buying back the other property.

Councillor Dean queried the unit cost of £163,000 for the redevelopment at Reynolds Court. He had been in discussion with Councillor Hargreaves who felt the unit cost was higher than comparable developments.

In response the Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services said the estimated unit cost included communal facilities, including lifts, which were being built as part of the development. The cost had been examined by a cost consultant who had considered the cost of the development to be in line with current market values.

The report was noted.

HB7

HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

Members received an update on homelessness from the Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager. She said the level of homelessness in 2014/15 was higher than 2013/14, but the rate of increase had slowed from 2012/13. Homelessness had proven difficult to deal with in Uttlesford due to unaffordable rent levels, which made it difficult for people who were homeless to secure tenancies. This issue had been made more prominent as it had been difficult to persuade private landlord landlords to take on tenants who were reliant on housing benefit.

The main positive was the average amount of time spent by accepted homeless families in Bed and Breakfasts had decreased significantly. This was due to the number of temporary units now provided by the Council.

The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager outlined the process the Council would undertake to develop its new Homelessness Strategy. It was proposed that the strategy would return to being a standalone document, as opposed to being a chapter in the Housing Strategy. A draft Strategy would be brought before the next meeting of the Housing Board before being put out for public consultation.

Members discussed the benefits of holding training on homelessness and agreed to incorporate this training with other training which was to be given to Members.

Discussions moved onto the long term effects of Right to Buy. Councillor Redfern, in response to Councillor Dean, said that whilst the Council did not collect information on residents after they had exercised Right to Buy she was aware of some instances where people had ended up homeless after purchasing a property through the scheme. The Housing Business and Performance Manager said the Council had improved its practices to support people who used Right to Buy.

In response to questions by Members, the Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager said the Council owned most of the temporary accommodation it used. Housing Benefit covered the cost of bed and breakfast if the Council needed to use this type of accommodation.

The report was noted.

HB8

ALLOCATIONS POLICY

The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager presented the report on the Allocations Policy and the amendments made to the Policy following recent Government guidance.

The new guidance meant the Right to Move had to be incorporated into the Policy. This meant the Council had to remove the local connection criteria for applicants who needed to either; move into the district to take up a definite employment offer, or maintain their current employment. These applicants would be given additional preference and would be placed one band higher subject to meeting the Right to Move criteria.

The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager said the Council had also re-examined its eligibility criteria and proposed amending it so that those who lived outside the district but worked within it, would now qualify for housing after three years instead of two, the same as the residency criteria.

Another proposed amendment added the wording on rural exceptions sites found in Section 106 agreements. This amendment followed legal guidance and had been agreed between the main provider of rural exception site schemes and the Council's legal officers.

The final amendment helped clarify when tenants of flats would be eligible for housing of a similar size. The Policy now included criterion that tenants must have lived in the flat for two years and conducted their tenancy in a satisfactory manner. This wording had been omitted from the original Policy.

Members discussed the Council's housing waiting list. In response to questions by Members, the Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager said the Council's waiting list was currently around 1,050 applications. This figure was lower than it was previously due to the stricter eligibility criteria included in the current Policy. A choice-based letting system was used so waiting times varied depending on property size and location.

In response to Councillor Loughlin it was agreed that Members would be given paper copies of the Policy once it had been agreed by Cabinet.

Councillor Dean questioned the Policy's ability to deal with exceptional circumstances. Members agreed that regardless of the criteria in place, someone would always fall marginally outside of the criteria boundaries. It was noted that the Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services could use her discretion in such scenarios. Councillor Dean said he was reassured by this point.

AGREED that the Allocations Policy was recommended to Cabinet as amended in the appendix to the report.

HB9

PERFORMANCE REPORT 2014-15 OUTTURN

The Housing Business and Performance Manager presented her report. She outlined the three levels of performance indicators; Key Performance Indicators (KPI's), Performance Indicators (PI's) and Local Performance Indicators (LPI's). Housing's performance indicators were all managed through Covalent, with KPI's and PI's being monitored by CMT and the Performance and Audit Committee. LPI's were monitored by CMT only.

Due to a change in the reporting format for Housemark data, officers were currently compiling reports for the Tenant's Forum and Housing Board. This meant no Housemark data was attached to the report.

In response to a question by Councillor Dean, the Housing Business and Performance Manager explained PI 15 had been put on hold as a new system of tracking performance was being implemented. Currently performance was tracked using a random sample of people who had works carried out for them. The new mobile system would allow a satisfaction survey to be completed by every resident who had repairs carried out for them.

The Housing Business and Performance Manager explained, in response to Councillor Morris, that although the Council did use contractors, repairs work was completed using in house staff. The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services added that the performance of external contractors was monitored through monthly meetings with the contractor. Additionally, a new contract had been signed with the contractor which incorporated performance indicators.

Councillor Loughlin questioned why data was no longer being collected for some of the PIs. The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services said that Fire Risk Assessments would be monitored differently through a team of officers.

The report was noted.

HB10

BRE STOCK PROFILES AND QUANTITATIVE HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The Principal Environmental Health Officer outlined his report on the recent British Research Establishment (BRE) Housing Stock Modelling and Health Impact Assessment. He said the Council is required to assess the districts housing stock under Section 3 of the Housing Act 2004.

Previously, these surveys involved taking a random sample of dwellings and extrapolating the findings. However, this approach was considered ineffective and the BRE survey method was now favoured.

The stock modelling approach utilises information from a number of sources (including English Housing Survey, census data and Experian consumers database) to provide information on the likely condition of housing stock at a local level.

The Council had also commissioned a quantitative Health Impact Assessment (HIA), which enhanced the information from the BRE and the housing stock modelling. The HIA estimated the costs of housing intervention and the benefits to health arising from potential works. The Council uses this to inform the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and to make funding bids.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer outlined the main findings of the HIA and explained hazards were split into two categories; Category 1 hazards were serious hazards which the Council had to act to rectify, Category 2 hazards were less serious so the Council had discretion as to whether it carried out works.

The HIA said there were 9,468 hazards in Uttlesford, 286 of these would cause incidents requiring medical attention, with most of these being for excess cold and falls. The estimated annual cost to society was estimated at £4million. Hazards were examined by looking at their payback periods. The shortest payback periods were for hazards associated with collisions, with longer payback periods for hazards such as excessive cold.

In response to questions from Members, the Principal Environmental Health Officer said houses of multiple occupation (HMOs) were split into two categories; licensed and un-licensed. The Council's strategy will look at improving licensed HMOs first. The Council had powers under the Housing Act to serve notice on properties, which enabled a more proactive approach.

The report was noted.

HB11 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Head of Environmental Health presented a leaflet to Members on air quality. He said air quality levels were under the limits set by the Government and air quality is likely to improve in the long term. The Council would continue to monitor air quality vigilantly to ensure that national air quality standards are not breached. Consultation on a new air quality action plan would also commence shortly.

Mr Bottler noted birds nesting in buildings had caused delays to capital projects and suggested putting up netting around drainpipes to prevent this from happening. He also suggested creating a critical path for future capital projects to allow for greater contingency planning.

HB12 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

It was agreed there would be meetings on 21 September 2014, 9 December 2014 and 8 March 2015.

The possibility of holding the meetings at external venues would be explored, as would organising a bus tour of the district.

The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services said that a training session would be organised and that Members should email her with any topics they would like to see covered in the training. In the meantime they could always contact her or the team if they had any specific questions.

The meeting ended at 12.30pm.