

**HOUSING BOARD held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 10am on 8 DECEMBER 2016**

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

Also present: Mrs Angela Hutton Mr Peter Stuart-Robinson (Tenant Forum Representatives)

Officers in attendance: D Malins (Housing Development Manager), R Millership (Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services), C Cardross Grant (Housing Renewals and Improvement Officer), M Cox (Democratic Services Officer), J O'Boyle (District Environmental Health Officer), J Snares (Housing and Communities Manager) and S Wood (Planning and Housing Policy Manager).

**HB21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Asker.

**HB22 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 October 2016 were received and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the correction of minute HB13 (iv) to read Sheds Lane, Saffron Walden.

**HB23 PROPOSED RENT AND SERVICE CHARGES 2017-18**

Members received a report, which set out details of the 2017/18 Housing Revenue Account (HRA), proposed changes in dwelling rent, garage rents and housing related support charges and service charges. The recommendations in the report had been approved by the tenants' forum and would be considered by Scrutiny and Cabinet before final approval by Full Council on 23 February 2017.

The Assistant Director Housing highlighted the key areas in the report. In terms of rent charges, 2017/18 was the second year of the Government's 4-year plan to reduce social rents by 1%. In addition the Government had confirmed that supported accommodation rents would also be reduced by 1% for 4 years from 2017/18. This would have a significant effect on the funds available in the HRA but was outside the council's control.

There were areas where the council did have a degree of control, including the setting of garage rents, the Lifeline service and charges for the council's sheltered housing management service. It was proposed to increase these

charges by RPI of 2%. It was also proposed that other service charges were increased in line with actual costs.

The other major change for 2017/18 was in relation to the Housing Related Support Grant (HRS) received from ECC. Last year the grant had been reduced, with the expectation of further reductions over the coming years. However, rather than continuing to taper the reduction, ECC has announced that all HRS funding would cease from April 2017.

It was estimated that around 250 sheltered tenants, who were currently on benefits, will be affected by these changes and would be required to contribute £40 - £50 a month to recover the full cost of the support charge. Officers had concerns about the effect on vulnerable tenants and intended to spend the next few months ensuring that the tenants had access to the relevant benefits and that the necessary support was in place.

Members asked whether UDC could replace the grant from the General Fund. The Assistant Director said that ECC had cut the grant as it believed that the affected tenants should be able to claim appropriate benefits to pay for the service themselves. Officers, with the assistance of the CAB, would visit tenants to ensure that they were accessing the necessary benefits to pay for this service. However, there was always a danger that some tenants might fall through the net and she suggested that the Board review the situation a few months into the new financial year.

Members questioned the rationale behind the Government imposed 1% rent reduction. There was concern that it would affect the ability of the HRA to deliver its building and improvement programme, and therefore fail to benefit tenants in the long run. Cllr Farthing thought the council should maintain its rents at the current level and asked about the consequence of not imposing the reduction.

The Assistant Director said it was likely that the Council would be penalised in another way if it decided to go against the Government's proposal. Also the tenants now had an expectation of a 1% reduction in rent.

Cllr Redfern said the council would continue to lobby the Government about the rent reduction. She also suggested arranging a member/officer meeting on the future of the HRA loan, to consider amongst other things how to sustain the reduction in rent, the effect of the right to buy provision and to consider options for better management, including possible restructuring of the loan.

It was AGREED

- 1 To recommend to Cabinet for approval a decrease in the HRA dwelling rents as detailed below:
  - General needs accommodation - a 1% reduction in rent as per central government legislation

- Supported accommodation - a 1% reduction in rent as per central government legislation
  - All dwelling rents to be revised to the formula rent level when the property is re-let
- 2 To continue to lobby Government to express disappointment at the imposition of the 1% reduction in dwelling rents.
  - 3 To recommend to Cabinet the approval of the increases in garage rent, support and service charges as detailed below:
    - Garage rents are increased by RPI of 2%
    - Housing related support charges are increased by RPI of 2%
    - Protection for tenants at 31st March 2003 who are ineligible for supporting people grant assistance to cease as no tenants will be receiving supporting people (HRS) grant funding from April 2017
    - Lifeline charges are increased by RPI of 2%
    - Heating, Service and Sewerage charges are increased in line with actual costs
    - Service charges for common services in sheltered schemes continue to be subsidised for tenants at 31st March 2012 who are not in receipt of housing benefit. Subsidy reducing by 25% annually
  - 4 To note Members' regret at ECC's decision to cut Supporting People (HRS) Grant and to ask officers to monitor the effects on those tenants who would be picking up the full cost of the service from April 2017 and report back to a future meeting.

HB24

## **HRA BUSINESS PLAN – ACTION PLAN UPDATE**

Members received an update on the HRA Business Plan priorities for action 2016-2021.

Under the heading 'regenerate the stock/estates', Cllr Dean asked about the Mountfitchet Estate Stansted and whether there was an opportunity to redesign site splays/green verges/laybys and to sort out the problems with parking. Officers said this was a long standing issue but it could be raised again with ECC highways.

In answer to a question regarding possible redevelopment of Parkside/Walden Place Saffron Walden, Members were informed that work had been delayed due to the present lack of funds, but it would be considered for the future.

The Action Plan was noted.

**DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

The Housing Development Manager gave a verbal update on the progress of developments on council owned sites.

(i) **Mead Court Stansted**

There had been further delays with this project, but there was now an assurance that the scheme would be finally completed by 16 December 2016.

(ii) **Reynolds Court – Newport**

The scheme was progressing well. The first phase was expected to be completed in June 2017.

(iii) **Hatherley Court - Saffron Walden**

A contractor had been appointed and the scheme was expected to commence in early spring.

(iv) **Sheds Lane, Saffron Walden**

Planning permission had been granted and the tender document was prepared and ready to be sent out. The predicted start date was March 2017.

(v) **Newton Grove, Great Dunmow**

There had been an offer of additional land, which could increase the scheme from 3 to 4 units and allow for additional parking on the site.

(vi) **The Mores little Dunmow**

This site, comprising 12 bungalows had been subject to subsidence. Officers had started to draw up a scheme for the site and the adjacent garage area.

(vii) **St Johns Close, Saffron Walden**

Members were informed that the valuation for bringing the property back into use had been lower than expected and it would be economically viable to bring the property back into use for rent.

Cllr Mills had been looking at possible development schemes. He would discuss with these officers, although this option might be more appropriate in the future, if and when further units became vacant.

It was AGREED to undertake the necessary work to bring the property back into use as temporary accommodation.

**HB26 HOUSING STRATEGY ACTION PLAN - UPDATE**

The Housing and Planning Policy Manager presented the 6 monthly update report on the Housing Strategy priorities for action 2016-2021.

It was noted that in relation to affordable housing, 120 units had already been delivered, when the target for the year was 100 units. There was also positive news in relation to funding of the learning disability scheme and the Cornell Court extra care scheme was due to be completed in 2018.

Mrs Hutton asked about the future provision for dementia care in the district. The Board was advised that there was some provision allocated within the extra care schemes. A specialist company was currently looking to find a suitable site to provide a dedicated centre within the district.

Members felt that there should be clearer links between the HRA and Housing Strategy action plans and it was agreed that the documents would be numbered accordingly.

**HB27 TENANCY SUSTAINMENT STRATEGY 2016**

Further to consideration at the last meeting, the Board received the final version of the strategy, which now included the action plan. No further comments had been received from Members.

It was AGREED that the Housing Board approves the final Tenancy Sustainability Strategy.

**HB28 CPO THAXTED**

The Housing Board considered a proposal to bring a long term empty property back into use.

It was AGREED that the Housing Board note the report and recommend to Cabinet that authority be given to proceed with the CPO.

**HB29 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would be held on 7 March 2017.

The meeting ended at 11.40am.

## ACTION POINTS

Minute HB23 Proposed rent and service charges 2017/18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To arrange an officer/member meeting to discuss the HRA loan.</li><li>• To make representations to the Government regarding the requirement for the 1% reduction in dwelling rents</li><li>• To monitor implications following cuts to HRS grant and report back to a future meeting</li></ul>
Minute HB24 Housing Strategy Action Plan	To provide consistent numbering for the HRA and Housing Strategies