

**HOUSING BOARD held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 10am on 7 MARCH 2017**

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

Also present: Mrs Angela Hutton and Mrs Carole Mandy (Tenant Forum Representatives)

Officers in attendance: A Bochel (Democratic Services Officer), F Butler (Senior Health Improvement Officer), B Ferguson (Democratic Services Officer), D Malins (Housing Development Manager), Rebecca Dobson (Principal Democratic Services Officer), J Snares (Housing and Communities Manager) and M Watts (Principal Environmental Health Officer).

**HB30 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Asker, Dean and Farthing and from the Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services.

**HB31 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2016 were received and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

The Housing and Communities Manager said Essex had withdrawn Supporting People funding from April, so officers were looking at the impact this change would have. Initial calculations had been calculated, and implications for the service and for tenants had been carried out.

In order to ensure there was a universal service, it was proposed to return to a system of offering only one level of service, so everyone had to have a minimum level, from which they could then opt out. A consultation had taken place on how to help people, and how they would pay, and she was pleased to report that the outcome for people was much better than had been initially thought.

Councillor Foley said this was a great result. He referred to Minute HB26, the Housing Strategy Plan update, and asked what the plan was now that Suzanna Wood had left.

The Housing and Communities Manager said there was now an opportunity to look at the options for planning policy management, and it had been agreed the post should move back from Planning to the Housing service. There had been a restructure within Housing, including creation of a Communities team. The

Housing and Communities Manager would be taking on housing strategy from April 2017. More information about the restructure would be circulated to members. The Housing and Communities Manager reassured members that resources had not been reduced for these services, but had simply been restructured.

HB32

## **DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

The Housing Development Manager gave a verbal update.

### **Mead Court, Stansted**

Works had been completed and tenants had moved back in. The improvements had been well-received. Accounts had now been signed off, with only £4,000 overspent, which was a pleasing result.

### **Catons Lane, Saffron Walden**

Work to remedy defects was now drawing to a close, with inspection due to take place in June 2017.

### **Reynolds Court, Newport**

Work was progressing, the roof had been installed and work to make it watertight was now progressing. Plastering would start in July 2017, and a meeting had taken place with the interior designers regarding communal areas.

The Housing Development Manager tabled a report from the suppliers of the proposed Sedum “green” roof. He said the plants had been grown and would be planted on the roof in June, as turf. It would be important to ensure careful maintenance and drainage. The roof contractor would maintain the roof for the first year, and thereafter it would be necessary for maintenance to be carried out by officers once a quarter.

Councillor Redfern asked how the turf would be applied, and expressed some concern that examples of Sedum roofs elsewhere had an unsatisfactory brown colour.

The Housing Development Manager said the waterproofing and integrity of the roof would be supported by a 20 year guarantee. The plants would take a little while to “bed in”. The issue was that it was a planning stipulation to have a green roof, and the second issue was that Newport had had problems with water run-off. This was a bigger building than before, but Anglia Water had

been satisfied with the proposed size of the rook, because Sedum retained water.

Councillor Mills said this was the third green roof with which he had been involved, and the previous ones had failed as the plants had died. It was essential to look at the irrigation system, and to arrange for a caretaker to ensure the watering worked properly, so that ultimately the roof could become self-sustaining.

The Housing Development Manager agreed maintenance was key.

Angela Hutton asked why a green roof had been chosen for this location and whether heavy rain would affect it.

The Housing Development Manager said a green roof was seen to be a sustainable method of containing run-off, particularly for large buildings. Planners had been satisfied that the building should be the proposed size, subject to appropriate camouflage. Without Sedum there would be water run-off, which would have cost implications for the water run-off for the rest of Newport.

### **Hatherley Court, Saffron Walden**

The Housing Development Manager said the aim was for works to start in May. Initially the proposal had been for a three-phase development, but now a two-phase programme was planned, as there were more empty properties at the site

### **Sheds Lane, Saffron Walden**

Planning permission had been obtained, and the work was currently out to tender.

### **Frambury Lane, Newport**

The application for planning permission was to be considered on 5 May 2017.

### **Newton Green, Dunmow**

The pre-application was being considered by the planning department.

### **The Moors, Little Dunmow**

Eight of 12 bungalows were empty; the architect was working on a scheme to progress the scheme, as the other four dwellings became empty in due course. The horticultural team were dealing with an infestation of Japanese Knotweed.

#### **Station Road, Wendens Ambo**

Following marketing, the Council had received three offers for this single plot, and others were anticipated. The revenue expected would represent income for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

#### **4 Hill Top Lane, Saffron Walden**

The development was at pre-application stage. The intention was to obtain outline permission for homes to be built and then to sell.

#### **The Elms Bungalow, Duton Hill**

The location was remote and therefore not ideal. Officers were considering securing outline planning permission for a detached two-storey house, and to sell for income for the HRA.

#### **St John's Close, Saffron Walden**

Work would be finished this month, following which advertising for the property to be re-let would be arranged.

HB33

#### **DRAFT HEALTH AND WELLBEING PLAN 2017-2022**

The Senior Health Improvement Officer presented the Health and Wellbeing strategy for 2017-2022. She referred the Board to the introduction to the Strategy, given by Councillor Wells, as Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing, and to the priorities set out in the document. There were five key areas, of reducing overweight and obesity; increasing physical activity for all; enabling people to age well; combating rural and social isolation; and combating winter pressures and fuel poverty. The Senior Health Improvement Officer said the strategy recognised underlying principles, such as tackling inequalities, and drew to members' attention the actions to be taken. Work would be undertaken with colleagues within West Essex to seek funding for different projects, including a link between Essex County Council and a practitioner at Uttlesford. Funding for 2016-17 had been made available.

Angela Hutton asked whether budget cuts in other areas, such as social care, would be relevant.

The Senior Health Improvement Officer said there had been many recent cuts to social care, and these would be identified and addressed where possible.

Angela Hutton asked whether match funding would be made available. The Housing and Communities Manager said match funding might not be available, but funding could be sourced elsewhere.

Angela Hutton asked whether user input would be sought. The Housing and Communities Manager said that decision would depend on circumstances. The Senior Health Improvement Officer said the intention was to avoid duplication of existing work.

HB34

### **DRAFT PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY**

Members considered a report presented by the Principal Environmental Health Officer on the draft private sector housing strategy. The report summarised the findings of the Draft Private Sector Housing Strategy (PSHS) consultation and outlined the Council's plans to meet people's housing needs by maintaining and improving the existing private housing stock in the district.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer said the strategy linked housing and wellbeing to the Local Plan, and would be included in the Environmental and Environmental Health service plan.

It was AGREED that the Housing Board note the amendments to the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy following consultation with key stakeholders and recommends the adoption of the strategy to Cabinet.

HB35

### **DRAFT HOME REPAIRS ASSISTANCE POLICY**

The Principal Environmental Health Officer presented a report on revisions to the existing Home Repairs Assistance Policy. The Policy had first been published in 2003 and had later been amended in 2008 to take into consideration thermal insulation and energy efficiency measures in mobile homes.

He said this policy had been revised to increase the range of offers and to change the focus of assistance from grants to loan products. The revised policy would provide the Council with greater flexibility to address poor housing conditions for the most vulnerable in society. There was a need to update the policy, following a consultation. Furthermore, from the end of March 2017,

services provided by Papworth Trust would be streamlined, and Uttlesford would aim to take control of the funding from this source.

In reply to a question from Councillor Redfern regarding the implications of the change to the Papworth Trust funding, the Principal Environmental Health Officer said Uttlesford had the lowest budget for disability facilities grants of all the local councils. If people could stay in their homes longer, there was a cost saving. There had been an increase of funds from Essex County Council, but ECC had decided to reduce funding. Papworth had concluded that disability adaptation funding was not viable, which would mean that although the Council intended to retain these services in-house, it would not have some of the elements such as handyman services.

Angela Hutton said Papworth Trust had charged £15 per hour for handyman services.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer said whilst the service from Papworth Trust would be withdrawn, more disability grant funding would be made available, and for wider purposes. Officers would be studying how the budget was being spent.

Councillor Ryles asked whether Uttlesford relied upon the voluntary sector for provision of such services.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer said there was an issue with linking external options with the Council's services, but that options would always be considered. The involvement of voluntary groups was such an option which would be explored.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer invited members to comment on the proposals and assured members that parish councils would be invited to comment.

Councillor Mills suggested linking up with the Uttlesford Transport Forum, which supported the involvement of volunteer drivers.

The Housing and Communities Manager said links for voluntary organisations were maintained by the CVSU.

Angela Hutton asked whether the service would be for tenants.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer said in response to a question from Angela Hutton as to whether the service would be for tenants, that it was for private residents.

Angela Hutton said some aspects of repairs were not the responsibility of the Council, such as fencing. As a tenant she had had to seek funding from Papworth Trust. Provision of such services could work well for tenants as well as the private sector.

Councillor Ryles said a skills database could be maintained for those willing to help offer such services.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer said the proposals included much to consider, such as the extension of services to all households, provided individuals met the eligibility criteria.

Councillor Redfern asked whether the Contract Services team could extend the services to tenants who did not meet the criteria, and recharge for work.

The Housing and Communities Manager said certain repairs were carried out by the council, subject to re-charge, and that tenants had the option to use another service provider in such cases.

It was AGREED to endorse the revised home repairs assistance policy and consent to a period of consultation to take account of the views and opinions of interested stakeholders.

HB32

## **TRAILBLAZER HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION BILL**

The Housing and Communities Manager brought to members' attention the Essex Countywide Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer Bid and the Homelessness Reduction Bill. She said Essex County Council with the support of the District Authorities had put in a bid for this money and had been awarded approximately 900K over two years. The projects target client group would include those who might not be owed a statutory homeless duty at the moment but who might be already known to existing agencies such as health or criminal justice. The money would be used to fund 10 specialist support case workers who would work across all districts in Essex. They would take on individual cases, working across various agencies to help resolve not only housing problems but the issues that may have led to homelessness or the threat of homelessness or that will make sustaining a tenancy difficult. This could mean that Uttlesford would share a case-worker.

Specialist workers would look at difficult cases and steer the authority once the bill came into force. Implications from London Boroughs were a "ripple" effect, for example, Southwark had no housing. However, Uttlesford was an

expensive area, so it might be passed by. However, the impact on other areas from London's housing needs could then also impact on Uttlesford. The intention of this report was therefore simply to raise members' awareness at present. There would be potentially greatly increased workload and demands on the housing options service.

Councillor Ranger said the prospect was ominous, and that Uttlesford would see little of the caseworkers. There could be an increase in wilful homelessness, and the housing service would feel the brunt of the work. There was a need to look seriously at how this issue would be tackled.

The Housing and Communities Manager said she hoped there would be only a gradual, rather than a sudden increase in housing need. She would monitor the implications and report further to Housing Board as necessary.

In response to a question from Angela Hutton as to which age groups tended to be in need of housing, the Housing and Communities Manager said those affected were from 16 years plus.

Angela Hutton asked where multiple occupancy solutions would be considered.

The Housing and Communities Manager said multiple occupancy would be considered in any event in some cases.

Councillor Ryles asked a question regarding empty but privately owned properties.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer said Uttlesford had some of the lowest levels of empty properties in the county. Following a referral, officers would apply pressure to owners to bring the property back into use. Unfortunately there was little that could be done regarding second homes.

Councillor Mills asked whether new homes bonus was obtained once a property was brought back into use.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer confirmed that New Homes Bonus was obtained in these circumstances.

HB32

## **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Dates would be circulated shortly.

Councillor Ranger asked whether the action points from the last meeting had been considered.

Regarding HB23 PROPOSED RENT AND SERVICE CHARGES 2017-18, Councillor Redfern confirmed that all such charges proposals were in hand. Dwelling rates would be checked and the information provided to members.

Regarding HB24, HRA BUSINESS PLAN – ACTION PLAN UPDATE, The Housing and Communities Manager said following on from the Council's budget-setting meetings, an update would be provided to the next meeting.

The meeting ended at 11.40am.