

**HOUSING INITIATIVE TASK GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 10.00 am on 4 MARCH 2009**

Present:- Councillor R H Chamberlain – Chairman.
Councillors E L Bellingham-Smith, E J Hicks, J E Hudson, J E Menell and D J Morson.

Tenant Forum representatives: Mrs E Rogers and Mr S Sproul.

Officers in attendance: M Cox (Democratic Services Officer), R Millership (Head of Housing Services), H Harvey (Senior Sheltered Housing officer) S Clarke (Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager) and S Walker (Housing Enabling and Development Officer).

HTG23 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2008 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HTG24 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute HTG20 – Void Property lettings

It was agreed that the recommendations in this minute should be considered at the next meeting of the Task Group.

(ii) Minute HTG19 (i) Negative Housing Subsidy

Under this minute, Councillor Morson mentioned the difficulties that had been experienced in calculating this year's rent levels. The process had involved complex calculations and the detailed figures from the Government had been received too late for discussion and revision before the rent setting meeting.

It was AGREED that representation be made to the Government asking for all the relevant figures to be made available prior to the Christmas holidays.

Mr Sproul reported on the recent meeting at the DCLG to discuss the negative housing subsidy that had been attended by Tenant Forum representatives from the eastern region. There had been representatives from a number of inner city councils present at the meeting and they had explained that a proportion of the subsidy payment was used to meet the large debt that these council's had accumulated through the building programme in the 1960's. The council's were currently lobbying the Government to dispose of these debts and this would result in a more level playing field for other local authorities in the country.

Members were surprised to hear this explanation and felt that it confirmed the lack of transparency of information that had been provided by the Government

on this issue. It was noted that the results of all the discussions that had taken place on the review of the housing subsidy process were available on the website and Roz Millership would circulate the link to members of the group.

HTG25 UPDATE ON HOLLOWAY CRESCENT

It was reported that officers, together with representatives from Swan Housing, had recently met with all the affected tenants to confirm that they were happy with the details of the scheme and they would be visited again on Friday with the final plans for agreement. All three phases of the project had been discussed and agreed with the affected residents. The exact mix of houses on the new build site would be confirmed with Swan and hopefully put before the Community Committee in March for agreement. The plans would then go to the Development Control Committee for approval. At this stage there was further opportunity for representations to be made by the public. Members were aware of the tremendous amount of work that had gone into progressing this scheme and thanked officers for all their efforts in achieving this.

HTG26 UPDATE ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Sophie walker circulated the latest figures on the delivery of affordable housing to the end of the financial year. An explanation was given on areas where slippage had occurred. It was noted that around 200 properties were either completed or underway. Any uncompleted properties would be rolled forward to next years figures. The figures compared favourably to the 60 properties that had been delivered in the previous financial year. Members asked if there were any notable effects of the economic turn down and were informed that there had been a reduction in the number of shared ownership schemes coming forward although existing schemes were still being progressed.

AGREED to provide for the next meeting the final figures for this financial year and a draft programme for the following year.

HTG27 DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY

The Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager presented the first draft of the Housing Strategy. Comments made at this meeting would be incorporated into the document before it was put out to consultation. It was hoped that the final strategy would go to the June meeting of the Community Committee for final approval. A copy of the document would be forwarded to the LSP and the Government Office.

The task group went through the document and noted that there was still some information to be added. Members asked a number of questions and a few amendments were made, mainly to the figures so as to reflect changed market conditions.

A number of specific points were raised

- Officers were asked to clarify the correct figures in relation to housing need.
- It was suggested that with parish and town councils should be given more information about the possibility for exemption housing schemes in their area.
- The document should highlight the action being taken in respect of mortgage arrears.
- A statement should be included to point out the potential for an influx of refugees arriving through Stansted Airport, the need for housing and the cost implications for the authority.

The final part of the document contained an action plan, which would be finalised for approval at the Community Committee. It was suggested that it should then be monitored on a quarterly basis by the Task Group.

Members commended officers for producing a detailed and well written document.

HTG28

AFFORDABLE HOUSING STRATEGY

The Task Group received copies of the Affordable Housing Strategy. This had been prepared along side the Housing Strategy and was to be mainly used as a guide for developers or housing associations. It was subject to the same consultation arrangements as the Housing Strategy and would be submitted to the Community Committee in June for approval.

HTG29

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be arranged prior to the Community Committee meeting in June.

The meeting ended at 11.50 am.