

**HOUSING INITIATIVES WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 2.00 pm on 26 OCTOBER 2009**

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

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

Officers in attendance: M Cox (Democratic Services Officer) R Goodey
(Building Services Manager) H Harvey (Senior Sheltered
Housing and Lifeline Officer) R Millership (Head of Housing
Services), L Petrie (Housing Management Manager) J Snares
(Housing Options/Homelessness Manager) and S Walker
(Housing Enabling and Development Officer).

HWG12 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Suzanna Wood.

HWG13 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2009 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HWG14 DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Working Group was given details of the delivery of affordable housing for 2009/10. It had previously been hoped that 120 houses would be delivered but this had now slipped to 84 as a number of units had not come on board at the Rochford Nurseries site. The numbers were down on the previous years figure of 154 but this could be attributed to market conditions.

In response to a request from Councillor Menell, it was agreed that officers write to parish councils reminding them of their role in the provision of rural housing exception schemes.

HWG15 PLACE SCHEME UPDATE

The Housing Enabling and Development Officer circulated photographs of the first property in the district to be refurbished under the Place Scheme. This scheme operated through a consortium (including Uttlesford) that received funds from the Government to bring long term empty properties in the private sector back into use. The renovation was carried out by a housing association and the property would be let by them for a period of 3 years before being handed back to the owner. Members could see the benefits of this scheme and suggested that now that the first property had been refurbished, it could be more widely publicised.

HWG16 HOLLOWAY CRESCENT UPDATE

The Working Group was updated on the progress of the Holloway Crescent Scheme following the decision at the Community and Housing Committee on 17 September. At that meeting it had been decided that the main priority should be to provide the 5 bungalows on the garage site. This would enable the remaining residents to be relocated from the sheltered site, and a decision on the future of that site to be taken at a later meeting.

The Council had decided to put in its own bid to provide the bungalows and this had to be submitted by 30 October; the outcome would be known in December. Officers were being assisted with the technical aspects and the procurement process by East Thames Housing Association.

Officers had met with the residents of the sheltered complex who were frustrated by the delay in the scheme. In order to progress the project the planning application based on the original plans would be submitted shortly.

During the meeting it became clear that the representatives of the Tenant Forum had not been aware of the recent decisions that had been taken in respect of this site. It was agreed that they should be included on the distribution list for the Community and Housing Committee.

The Chairman stated that significant progress had been made with this scheme and further details would be reported to the Community and Housing Committee on 12 November.

HWG17 HOUSING OPTIONS/CONDITION SURVEY UPDATE

The Buildings Services Manager reported the results of the Housing Condition Survey. This had been the subject of a presentation by the Council's consultants earlier in the week. The results showed that overall the stock was in fairly good condition but there was likely to be issues of funding in year 5. Officers would be looking at how this could be addressed. Members said that the presentation had been very informative and congratulated the repair staff for keeping the stock in such good order.

The Head of Housing Services informed the Working Group that a mini options appraisal had been undertaken as part of the annual business plan. It had identified that there was likely to be a problem with the capital funding at year 5 and it was important to plan ahead in order to smooth over the peak. Any necessary amendments to the programme would be discussed in conjunction with the Tenant Forum.

The Group then discussed the implications of the Government's HRA review. It was still unclear if the Council would be in a better financial position once the Negative Housing Subsidy was withdrawn as it was likely to be allocated a proportion of £17bn housing debt. The consultant had suggested that the Council might be required to pay off these debts with any capital receipts that would be gained from stock transfer, thus removing the benefits of this option. The Chairman felt that it was important that the Government and opposition

parties were fully aware of the effect that these policies would have on small councils.

This item would be considered at the next meeting of the Community and Housing Committee and any further details on the reform of council housing finance would be included in the report.

HWG18 REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S ALLOCATION SCHEME

The Working Group received a proposed scope for the review of the Council's allocation scheme. It was also given details of the Council's current policy and an example of a banding scheme operated by Epping Forest Council.

The scope had suggested that the issue of changing from CBL, using another system provider and leaving the consortium should not be looked at as part of the review. However the Chairman argued that all issues should be considered for this to be a full and robust exercise. Officers agreed to amend the scope accordingly but explained that the use of a CBL scheme through the current consortium had only recently been agreed by Committee and this council could not afford to act on its own. Also, the system was driven by tenants and tenant choice and it would be a retrograde step to revert to the old system. Officers explained that the purpose of the review was to take into account the recently published statutory code of guidance and look at the workings of the current allocations scheme and assessment process to see if these could be improved to possibly make them more transparent and user friendly.

The report suggested that there should be site visits to good practice authorities and it was hoped that this could be arranged before Christmas.

There was some concern amongst members that the current CBL scheme resulted in more people from outside the district being allocation properties. Officers replied that in Uttlesford, and throughout the county the numbers on the housing list were increasing, but this did not translate into increased allocations to residents from outside the district, as priority was given to Uttlesford residents through the points scheme.

The Working Group agreed the proposed scope and noted that it was due to be completed by March 2009. In order to progress the review it was agreed that the following matters be considered at the next meeting.

- The implication of leaving the CBL scheme.
- Arguments for and against a point system and a banding system.
- Details of what was legally required to be provided and what matters were discretionary under the scheme.

HWG19 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on 7 January 2007 at 2.00pm.

The meeting ended at 3.30pm Page 3