

**HOUSING INITIATIVES WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 25 OCTOBER 2010 at 2.00pm**

Present:- Councillor R H Chamberlain – Chairman.
Councillors J E Hudson and J E Menell.

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

Officers in attendance: Maggie Cox (Democratic Services Officer), Helen Harvey (Senior Sheltered Housing/Lifeline Officer), Martin Ling (Interim Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager), Roz Millership (Head of Housing Services) and Liz Petrie (Housing Management Manager).

HWG12 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E Bellingham Smith, D J Morson and S V Schneider.

HWG13 WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Martin Ling, who was covering the post of Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager on a part time basis, whilst Suzanna Wood was on maternity leave.

HWG14 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 July 2010 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HWG15 BUSINESS ARISING

i) Minute HWG8 – Update on new allocations policy

The proposal to withdraw the paper distribution of the free sheets had been agreed by the user groups and the new procedure to print off the vacancy sheets from the Council's website would now be implemented.

HWG16 CONDITIONS OF TENANCY

The Housing Management Manager circulated a first draft of new conditions of tenancy. These had been produced following a request from this group and also concerns from the Audit Commission that the Council's current tenancy conditions were too basic. The Council's conditions did appear to be simpler than other authorities and the drafts now circulated expanded and update the document. The new conditions had tried to address the many issues that had

been experienced by housing staff and it was hoped that they would have more teeth to deal with future problems and issues.

Members were asked to submit their comments by the beginning of December and the tenant's forum was being consulted on 5 November. The document would then be updated and circulated again before submitting to the Community and Housing Committee in March.

The new conditions would then be issued to tenants after 1 April together with the new tenants' handbook.

Members were aware of the changes to council tenancy arrangements proposed by the Government that were likely to require a different form of tenancy agreement. Further details were awaited but these new conditions of tenancy would still be of value to existing tenants.

HWG17 HOUSING REPORT TO TENANTS

The working group received a copy of the housing department's annual report to tenants for 2009/10. It set out how the Council was meeting its tenants' needs in line with the Tenant Services Authorities (TSA) national standards. The report had been submitted to the TSA for publication on the website. A compact version would be circulated to tenants in due course.

It had recently been announced that the TSA would be abolished from 2012 but officers felt that this had been a useful exercise and they would continue to produce this report.

HWG18 HOLLOWAY CRESCENT

The working group was updated on progress at this site. The first phase of the new build bungalows was going well and the grant application from the HCA had been approved. There was now an issue with the remaining vacant sheltered units which would need to be formally addressed. It was agreed that there should be a meeting of the Holloway Crescent Task Group to discuss the way forward and investigate possible funding. The group would need to put forward various options for consideration by the Community and Housing Committee.

HWG19 AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Members received an update on the affordable housing development programme. It was noted that funding for all schemes in the 2010/11 programme had been confirmed. Members asked detailed questions about the progress of various sites and were advised that the programme would be further updated and circulated once the new Housing Enabling and Development Officer was in post.

The Chairman commented that the number of new builds achieved this year was commendable given the current financial climate.

HWG20 UPDATE ON NEW ALLOCATION POLICY

The new allocation policy was now likely to be implemented in March/April 2011.

HWG21 TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION FACILITY MOLE HILL GREEN

The new temporary accommodation at Mole Hill Green Takeley had now been completed and members had been invited to an open day. They would then be in use immediately and officers would monitor the success of the facility.

It was noted that the recent Government announcement regarding a possible rise in social housing rents together with a decrease in housing benefit allowances pointed towards potential problems and a possible increase in homelessness.

HWG22 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

An updated version of the Housing Strategy action plan was circulated for information.

HWG23 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

There were no matters of immediate concern for the working group to consider so it was agreed that officers would liaise with the Chairman when a meeting was required.

The meeting ended at 3.10 pm