

**HOUSING BOARD held COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 2.30pm on 24 APRIL 2014**

Present: Councillor V Ranger (Chairman)
Councillors S Barker, A Dean, K Mackman, J Menell, D
Perry and J Redfern (Portfolio Holder for Housing).

Tenant Forum Representatives: Mrs D Cornell and Mr D Parish

Tenant Regulatory Panel Representative: Mrs Effie Rogers

Officers in attendance: P Evans (Housing Business and Performance Manager), E Fellowes (Accountant), D Malins (Housing Development Manager), R Millership (Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services), A Rees (Democratic Services Support Officer), G Smith (Head of Environmental Health), J Snares (Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager) and S Woods (Housing Strategy Manager).

Also Present: Councillor J Ketteridge

HB35 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Freeman and J Loughlin.

Councillor Ranger and Mr Parish both declared a non-pecuniary interest as tenants of the Council.

Councillor Barker declared a non-pecuniary interest as a County Councillor.

HB36 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9 JANUARY 2014

The minutes were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HB37 MATTERS ARISING

(i) Minute HB27 – Matters Arising

Councillor Dean would be meeting representatives of Colne Housing on 1 May 2014.

(ii) Minute HB30 – Welfare Reform Update

According to the Government, there had been reports of errors relating to the calculation of the Spare Room Subsidy in some instances. Councillor Perry asked whether this had affected the Council.

The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager said the loophole had been closed.

HB38

DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

(i) Mead Court Update

Members were informed on the progress of development at Mead Court by the Housing Development Manager. General progress was good, however asbestos had been found under the garage site. The contract signed by the Council protected it from additional costs arising from the removal of asbestos. The handover was now scheduled for the beginning of January.

Councillor Dean was happy no resident had complained about the development. The site manager appeared to have a good relationship with residents.

Councillor Barker asked whether the highways issues had been resolved.

The Housing Development Manager said that highways had now responded and progress was being made.

(ii) Sheltered Schemes

The Housing Development Manager outlined progress on the Reynolds Court site in Newport. The site comprised of 29 apartments, of which most were bedsits. They were not fit for purpose. Options for a complete redevelopment or remodelling were being considered. Drawings were being produced in order to ascertain the likely cost for both. Drawings would be put on display in the scheme in early May for two weeks for residents to comment on.

The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services said that if members wanted to see the display at the scheme they should contact the Housing Development Manager.

Progress made at the Walden Place site in Saffron Walden was outlined by the Housing Development Manager. The scheme sat in a conservation area. Members had previously highlighted the high cost of maintenance for the listed house. The possibility of detaching the scheme from the listed house was being looked at. Options for the house were also being looked at. The Council's conservation officer was keen to help with the site. Advice for valuation of the house had been requested.

Councillor Menell noted that the Council had not employed an in house architect for a long period of time. This could be looked at as an alternative to employing private architects.

The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services said this could be looked at. It had been looked at one year ago and was deemed to not be cost effective due to the small number of projects at that time.

The Housing Development Manager outlined the scheme at Hatherley Court, Saffron Walden. It was generally a good sheltered scheme but the bedrooms were too small. All residents have been consulted. Architects had been asked to look at ways of solving this issue. The conservation officer was happy with the proposed changes, as were tenants. Moving the lounge to the ground floor was also being considered. This would result in the loss of one flat. An internal survey was to be carried out. Meetings with the Planning and Conservation departments were being planned. Residents of up to four flats would have to be relocated at any one time. Each period of renovation would take up to 10 weeks.

(iii) Development Site – Catons Lane, Saffron Walden

Members were informed by the Housing Development Manager that there were three options for developing the site. They should recommend to Cabinet which one they preferred. Members should also recommend to Cabinet that the site was progressed to planning application stage. Option 1 was likely to have the fewest objections. All options would be discussed with planners. The options were as follows.

- 1) Six homes, four two bedroom houses, two one bedroom houses. An estimated cost of £696,906.
- 2) Seven homes, three two bedroom houses, two one bedroom houses, two one bedroom flats. An estimated cost of £755,696.
- 3) Eight homes, two two bedroom houses, two one bedroom houses, four one bedroom flats. An estimated cost of £799,858.

Councillor Barker and Mr Parish asked what was being done to ensure parking was satisfactory. Parking should be directly in front of housing.

Councillor Perry asked how many of the sites garages were currently in use.

Councillor Mackman inquired about the quality of housing that was to be built. Would housing be built to a passive standard?

In response to these questions, the Housing Development Manager said the issue of parking was being raised. Only four of the garages were currently in use. Due to the cost of developing on brown field sites, building houses to a passive standard would not be cost efficient. However all the houses would be built to the council's design brief, which aimed for a high environmental standard.

Councillor Barker was concerned about the impact on the residents of house no.14. They would lose part of their garden.

The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services said the resident of the property had already been contacted and was happy with the situation.

AGREED to recommend to Cabinet that:

- a) Development option 1 should be progressed.
- b) The site should be progressed to the planning application stage, having regard to the estimated costs associated with the works.

Councillor Ketteridge left the meeting.

(iv) Development Site – Ravens Crescent, Felsted

The Housing Development Manager said Felsted Parish Council had been approached about development at the site. Their lease expired soon. The tenant at no.19 was willing to give up part of the garden to allow works to take place.

Councillor Dean said it was important the scheme did not take away green areas that were being used by the local community.

The Housing Development Manager had met with the parish council about this issue. Other play areas were being upgraded. The play area on the site was rarely used.

AGREED to recommend to Cabinet that:

- a) The site should be progressed to the planning application stage, having regard to the estimated costs associated with the works.

The Housing Development Manger left the meeting.

(v) Development Programme Update 2013/14

Councillor Menell approved of the schemes but believed they took too long to be delivered. Arkesden Parish Council had been enthusiastic about the programme but felt that local applicants had not benefitted as the development took so long to get to completion that the applicants had found alternative accommodation.

In response Councillor Redfern said if any Arkesden residents had applied to go on the housing register they would have been given priority.

Councillor Dean commented on a Section 106 that contained an option that allowed developers to deliver council housing that would be less than the 40% of affordable housing on a development site.

The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services said that if this was put forward as an option it would need to be considered by members but that providing the maximum affordable houses remained a priority. Adding more limited numbers to the council's own stock would result in securing an ongoing rental income that could be used to fund additional affordable housing at other sites.

Members noted the report.

HB39

TENANT REGULATORY PANEL UPDATE

Members were informed that the Tenant Regulatory Panel consisted of five members. It was an independent body whose main aim was to scrutinise Housing processes and procedures. The first review looked at Void properties

The Housing Business and Performance Manager was producing an action plan based on responses. Regular updates could be brought to the Housing Board.

Councillor Dean asked why there was a difference between the benchmark void and the actual void.

In response, The Housing Business and Performance Manager said the benchmark was a snapshot figure. It would be different now.

An action plan would be brought to the next meeting.

AGREED that the Board would decide on further actions once an action plan had been produced.

Councillor Barker left the meeting.

The Board agreed that Item 10 would be the next item on the agenda.

HB40

ALLOCATIONS POLICY UPDATE

Members considered new supplementary statutory guidance on social housing of local authorities. The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager said that in response to the new guidance, some councils had made their allocations policy more restrictive. A decision on whether to change the policy would need to be considered. Any decision would have to put up for public consultation.

The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services said a workshop would be set up to consider this important issue before the

next Housing Board meeting. It was decided to invite all members, as well as the Tenants Forum.

AGREED that:

- a) A workshop would be set up before the next Housing Board meeting.
- b) All members and all members of the Tenants Forum would be invited to attend.

Councillor Redfern left the meeting.

HB41 WELFARE REFORM UPDATE

The report was outlined by the Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager. The amount of tenants affected by the Spare Room Subsidy had decreased. The average amount of arrears had increased. The amount of tenants receiving Discretionary Housing Payments would be lower in quarter four. The decrease in the number of downsizing grants being paid was possibly caused by the time of year.

The Board noted the report.

HB42 HOUSING PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND TARGETS 2014/15

The Housing Business and Performance Manager explained the Housing Service used performance indicators to manage its performance. Performance indicators were reviewed and monitored by CMT. The benchmark reports would be brought to the next meeting of the Housing Board.

In response to question by Councillor Menell, the Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager said bed and breakfasts were only used as emergency temporary accommodation when other temporary accommodation was not available.

The Board noted the report.

HB43 HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager outlined the report. There had been an increase in homelessness and homeless applicants being placed in temporary accommodation. Work at Mead Court would provide four additional units of temporary accommodation. Officers had tried to identify additional units that could be used for temporary accommodation. The Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme was now in house. Due to housing demand in the district and the increase in private rents, it was becoming more difficult to get people who were on housing allowance into private accommodation. The hardship fund of £100,000 was sufficient to deal with problems.

Councillor Dean highlighted the need to identify the cause of homelessness. There was a need to measure the relationship of people on register against housing availability.

The Planning and Housing Policy Manager said the Joint Research and Intelligence Officer, Stephen Rhenius could provide information to answer Councillor Dean's query.

The Board noted the report.

HB44

HOUSING STRATEGY

(i) Review

Members were informed by the Planning and Housing Policy Manager of the need to change the housing strategy to the following:

- 1) A four unit development would provide 80% of the build cost for an affordable unit.
- 2) A three unit development would provide 60% of the build cost for an affordable unit.
- 3) A two unit development would provide 40% of the build cost for an affordable unit.
- 4) The payment would be index linked.
- 5) For the financial years of 2013/14 and 2014/15 the cost of an affordable unit would be £125,000.

This policy was approved by Cabinet on 27 March 2014. The Council had a viability consultant to determine whether asking for a contribution where necessary. The decision had to be taken at Cabinet, rather than at the Housing Board due to constraints caused by the Local Plan.

The Board noted the change in policy would happen.

(ii) Progress Report

The Planning and Housing Policy Manager outlined the report which provided an update for members of the work that had been carried out in the last six months. This included work at Mead Court and the completion of 80 affordable homes in the previous financial year.

The Board noted the report.

HB45

TENANCY FRAUD INITIATIVES – FEEDBACK

The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager informed members of the measures being taken to combat tenancy fraud. The Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013 had made the following changes to civil and criminal law:

- 1) Created new criminal offences of unlawful subletting by assured and secure tenants in social housing.
- 2) Gave local authorities powers to prosecute in cases of unlawful subletting.
- 3) Enabled the courts to order the recovery of any profit made through unlawful subletting.
- 4) Assured tenants who illegally sublet their whole dwelling cannot regain the security of their tenure.

Data was being compared to help combat fraud. A traffic light system was being used to identify where data matched. This helped to identify fraudulent claims.

The Board noted the report.

HB46

FUTURE FUNDING OF DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS

The Head of Environmental Health said in 2013 the Government had announced £3.8bn of funding to support the Better Care Fund. Its intention was to pool funding for health and social care services. The money was to be allocated regionally. The Better Care Fund included funding previously allocated for private sector Disabled Facilities Grants Funding. The Council had been allocated £73,857 for 2014/15 and £103,000 for 2015/16. The Council's funding was the third lowest in the entire country. The Council needed to make sure its case was heard.

Members considered the funding allocated to the Council to be unfair. It was important to gain funding that was proportionate to the level of demand throughout Uttlesford. Members gave officers their support to try and gain more funding.

Mr Parish said he would raise the issue at the next Forum meeting.

The Head of Environmental Services informed members of an empty home in Widdington. The owner of the property had been contacted about the property. If it was necessary a compulsory purchase order would be raised.

The Board noted that:

- a) Essex County Council intended to review the provision of Disabled Grant Funding.
- b) Officers would participate in any review or consultation process to ensure that the needs and requirements of residents requiring adaption works continued to be met.

HB47

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Newport depot has been re-modelled and all housing maintenance and repairs staff were now located there. A drop in day is going to be held on 8 May from 10am – 3pm. The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services invited all members to attend. An e-mail reminder would be sent.

HB48

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held on 24 July 2014 at 2.30pm.

The meeting ended at 5.05pm.