

HOUSING BOARD held at HATHERLEY COURT SHELTERED HOUSING COMPLEX at 10.30am on 13 NOVEMBER 2014

Present: Councillor Perry (Chairman)
Councillors A Dean, M Felton, J Freeman, J Loughlin, J Menell, V Ranger, J Redfern and J Rose.

Also present: Mrs Daphne Cornell (Tenant Forum representative), Mrs Effie Rogers (Tenant Regulatory Panel).

Officers in attendance: S Baxter (Housing Enabling Officer), P Evans (Housing Business and Performance Manager), F Gardiner (Anti-Social Behaviour and Housing Management Co-Ordinator), E Horner (Accountant), D Malins (Housing Development Manager), R Millership (Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services), A Rees (Democratic and Electoral Services Officer), J Snares (Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager) and S Wood (Housing Strategy Manager).

HB12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Smith, Mr Parish and Mr Baker.

Councillor Ranger declared a non-pecuniary interest as a tenant of the Council.

Councillor Rose declared a non-pecuniary interest as he lived in affordable housing.

HB13 APPOINTMENT OF A NEW CHAIRMAN

Councillor Ranger stepped down from his role as Chairman following his appointment as the Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships.

Members agreed to appoint a chairman on a temporary basis until a new Deputy Member for Housing was appointed to Cabinet.

Councillor Perry was nominated and duly appointed as Chairman of the Housing Board.

HB14 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22 JULY 2014

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

HB15 MATTERS ARISING

(i) Minute HB3 – Environmental Improvements

Councillor Ranger asked about the issues with the efficiency ratings of the Moat HA housing in Leaden Roding. Councillor Redfern said the issues were being dealt with.

(ii) Minute HB3 – Environmental Improvements

In response to a question by Councillor Dean about achieving energy use parity, Councillor Ranger said the objective was to provide parity of unit energy costs across the Council's stock.

The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services said there was widespread energy rating disparity amongst the Council's stock, which was now being addressed through various energy saving measures.

HB16 TENANTS' REGULATORY PANEL

Mrs Rogers gave a verbal update on recent work carried out by the Tenants' Regulatory Panel. She said following the Panel's review into void properties, the Council had implemented eleven of the twelve recommendations suggested by the Panel. The Panel's next project would be a review of the sheltered housing service standards.

Mrs Cornell said the Panel had been nominated for the best new Tenant Scrutiny Panel at the National Scrutiny awards and she attended the awards ceremony on behalf of the Panel. Although the Panel did not win, they were proud to be nationally recognised for their work.

Members congratulated the Panel on their achievement.

HB17 DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

(i) Catons Lane

The Housing Development Manager said planning permission had been granted in October for six houses. These would replace a number of garages, most of which were derelict. Development of the site was now out for tender and it was hoped work would start in March, with a handover by the end of next year.

In response to questions by Members, the Housing Development Manager said the site was enclosed and therefore six houses worked more effectively than eight, and would still provide accommodation for the same number of people. Affordable Housing Grant was not being used for this development as it could not be used in addition to money available for Right to Buy.

Members discussed how the allocation of housing grant and right to buy funding worked. Members agreed that a workshop on funding of housing

developments should be arranged and that all members of the Council should be invited.

(ii) Mead Court

Members received an update from the Housing Development Manager. Phase 1 of the development was progressing well, with the proposed handover taking place on 10 December. There would be a handover ceremony which Members would be invited to once a date had been finalised.

In response to a question by Councillor Loughlin, the Housing Development Manager said the scheme had been delayed for three weeks as asbestos had been found. The developer had paid all of the costs associated with its removal.

Councillor Dean asked how the address names were to be decided. The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services said discussions would take place with the Parish Council once other parts of the sites had been demolished. The current build site was adjoining Cannons Mead, so it was likely the re-developed units would take the same name.

(iii) Reynolds Court

The Housing Development Manager said the site comprised 31 apartments, most of which were bedsits. These bedsits were regularly refused as accommodation and this resulted in rent loss throughout the scheme. Facilities throughout the scheme were of a poor quality, although the scheme was in an excellent location with good public transport links and had easy access to local facilities.

Tenants were supportive of the scheme and wanted re-development to take place in two phases. Newport Parish Council was also positive about the re-development. Following the consultation, the design for the appearance of the building had been altered.

The aim was to submit the re-development plans to the Planning Committee in February so that work could begin in July.

Members discussed design aspects of the sedum roof. The Housing Development Manager said a barrel roof was necessary as the scheme was three stories high and an ordinary roof would be too visually obtrusive. Councillor Ranger explained that sedum roofs were waterproofed and were designed to provide effective drainage.

Councillor Rose said the consultation process had proven to be really productive and was pleased that changes had been made in response to the consultation. He asked what was being done to minimise disruption to the general public during re-development.

The Housing Development Manager said the contractor chosen would have a proven track record on similar developments and would have a liaison officer. There was also the possibility of extra parking provision being provided for the general public.

The report was noted.

(iv) Hatherley Court

Members received information about the proposed re-modelling of Hatherley Court. The Housing Development Manager said currently the scheme comprised 26 one bedroom units. All of them had poorly designed kitchen areas and a number of units had bedrooms which were too small. The scheme also lacked a purpose built scooter store and did not have a reception area, or an easily identifiable entrance.

The Housing Development Manager said the Planning Committee had given permission for the re-modelling to take place. Re-modelling would include the installation of wet rooms, Juliet balconies for each unit and the removal of one flat on the ground floor so the common room could be relocated. Works would also make the entrance clearer and would provide a net gain of one unit on the site.

Members discussed the layout of the garden area. Councillor Loughlin suggested altering the pathway to make the garden area more appealing. Following discussions about the garden area of the scheme, members agreed that tenants should be consulted about the design of the garden.

The report was noted.

(v) Radwinter Road

The Housing Development Manager said the site was the affordable housing element of a larger development. This was the result of a Section 106 agreement, which stated that land had to be made available, for nil cost, for a 60 unit Extra Care Scheme.

In order to deliver the scheme, the Council was working with one of its Registered Providers, East Thames Housing Association which was leading the project. Currently the proposals would provide a 73 bed Extra Care Scheme, which would all be self-contained, fully accessible and energy efficient.

So far funding had been secured from the following sources:

- Essex County Council - £983,000
- Uttlesford District Council - £500,000 (commuted sum)
- HCA Funding NAHP 2015/18 - £1,217,000
- East Thames HA recycled grant - £500,000

- East Thames HA internal profit - £600,000

The scheme was expected to cost around £12,000,000 and funding for the remaining cost of the scheme would be provided by the East Thames Housing Association development loan facility.

Although East Thames Housing Association would manage the scheme, the Council would have nomination rights to the affordable housing element meaning that all residents in the affordable housing units would come from the Council's housing register.

The report was noted.

(vi) Housing Association Development

Members received information about the Affordable Housing Development Programme 2014-15. The Housing Strategy Manager said the following schemes were expected to be completed by the end of the current financial year:

- Hampit Road, Arkesden
- Land adjacent to Jogneys Meadow, Chrishall,
- Broomfields, Hatfield Heath
- Ashdon Road PHASE 2, Saffron Walden
- Mead Court Phase 1, Stansted Mountfichet
- Rochford Nurseries/ Forest Hall Park, Stansted Mountfichet
- Wedow Road, Thaxted

The scheme at Maple Road, Wimbish had now received planning permission. Work was expected to start in spring next year.

An information event was due to be held in Newport about the Rural Exception Scheme that was going to be built. There would be up to thirty-five houses in the scheme and residents would be able to register their interest in one of the affordable homes.

The report was noted.

HB18

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Members considered a report on the Council's anti-social behaviour policy and procedure. The Anti-Social Behaviour and Housing Management Co-Ordinator said some changes had been made to the draft following a training day. It had been suggested that tenants signed an Anti-Social Behaviour contract.

Following questions by Councillor Dean, the Anti-Social Behaviour and Housing Management Co-Ordinator said the action taken had to be decided on a case by case basis. Furthermore, some complaints would be dealt with under other policies and by other departments such as Environmental

Services. In some cases, departments would work with each other in order deal with a case.

Councillor Perry noted that the Council had worked in conjunction with the Police on numerous occasions. This had proven to be effective and had resulted in a number of cases being resolved.

Members discussed the terminology used with paragraph 6.3 Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABC), as some words were open to many different interpretations. The Anti-Social Behaviour and Housing Management Co-Ordinator told members that wording such as “offensive” did not need to be included in every contract, but did provide a framework for complaints to be made against.

Members agreed to amend the wording in paragraph 4 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy to ensure the phrasing “alleged perpetrator” was used. Councillor Perry proposed the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and Procedure was recommended to Cabinet, subject to the agreed amendments.

AGREED to recommend to Cabinet the Anti-Social Behaviour and Policy and Procedure for approval, subject to the agreed amendments.

HB19

HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

Members considered a report on the Council’s Housing Allocations policy. The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager said the Council was looking to alter its Housing Allocations Policy following further guidance issued by the Government following the Council’s adoption of its current policy in 2013.

The draft policy would mean that applicants would have to demonstrate a close local connection in order to meet the eligibility criteria. This would lead to a small number of people no longer being eligible, although the vast number of people on the housing register would meet the proposed criteria.

Councillor Dean suggested that paragraph 5.2.i should be rephrased so that university students did not need to have lived in the district for three continuous years before they moved to university. Whilst studying at university, students should still be considered as living within the area. The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager agreed to rephrase the paragraph to reflect this.

Members considered the implications of the proposed policy on direct letting and whether direct letting would be appropriate in certain circumstances. The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager informed members that direct letting could not be a part of the Housing Allocations Policy as direct letting was not compatible with a choice based letting system. Appendix 1 had been amended to include an extra sentence on general needs and to remove the sections on “Applicants with a medical or social need for a larger

property” and “Extra rooms for carers”. She would e-mail the final draft to members before it was sent to Cabinet for approval.

AGREED to recommend to Cabinet the Housing Allocations Policy, subject to the amended version being circulated for final comment.

HB20

HRA BUSINESS PLAN FINANCIAL REVIEW

Members considered a report on a financial review of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan. The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services said the HRA Business Plan financial review included the cost of all current projects. The Plan was reviewed on an annual basis to ensure its resilience and ability to deliver the Council’s objectives. There would be a funding shortfall in years 4 and 5 if all proposed schemes were to proceed within projected time frames and there may be a need to stagger or re-prioritise some projects.

In response to a question by Councillor Dean, the Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services explained income had been calculated based on assumptions about formula rents as the primary measure for rent setting. The Government had now suggested using the CPI measure of inflation to determine rent levels. The decision on whether to use CPI or to continue to rent set in line with the councils rent setting policy would have to be discussed during the rent setting process.

The report was noted.

HB21

HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

Members received information from The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager about homelessness. Homelessness figures had risen in quarters 1 and 2 of 2014/15, having dropped in quarter 4 of 2013/14. The number of customers who received in-depth housing advice for the first six months of 2014/15 was almost equal to the entirety of 2013/14.

In response to questions by members, the Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager said environmental services helped to identify empty properties.

The report was noted.

HB22

HOUSING STRATEGY/ HOUSING CONFERENCE

The Housing Strategy Manager gave a verbal report on the Housing Strategy and Housing Conference. The conference had comprised of a number of presentations and workshops. Following the conference, the next

steps were to finish the consultation and complete the draft of the Housing Strategy.

Members thanked officers for their work in organising the conference. Councillor Perry said the conference had been very informative and provided a good forum for discussion on the Housing Strategy.

HB23

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting would be 27 January 2015.

It was agreed that the possibility of holding the next meeting at another external venue would be explored.

The meeting ended at 12.35pm.