



# Uttlesford District Council

Chief Executive: Dawn French

## Housing Board

**Date:** Thursday, 21st November, 2019

**Time:** 11.00 am

**Venue:** Council Chamber - Council Offices, London Road, Saffron Walden,  
CB11 4ER

**Chair:** Councillor P Lees

**Members:** Councillors A Armstrong, A Coote, A Dean, A Gerard, A Khan,  
M Lemon, S Merifield and N Reeve

**Tenant Forum Representatives:** Carole Mandy and Simon Trimnell

## AGENDA

**1 Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest**

To receive any apologies for absence and declarations of interest.

**2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting** 5 - 8

To consider the minutes of the previous meeting.

**3 Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy** 9 - 30

To consider the attached Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025

**4 Rent and Service Charge Setting** 31 - 36

To consider the attached report; Housing Revenue Account - Proposed Rent, Service and Support Charge increase 2020/21

**5 Tenant Regulatory Panel (TRP) update** 37 - 50

To consider the Tenant Regulatory Panel update.

**6 Development Update**

Verbal Update

**7 Exclusion of public and press**

Consideration of reports containing exempt information within the meaning of section 100I and paragraph 1 part 1 Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972.

**PART 2**

**Exclusion of Public and Press**

**8 Housing Repairs and Maintenance proposals**

To consider a verbal update of the housing repairs and maintenance proposals.

**For information about this meeting please contact Democratic Services**

Telephone: 01799 510369 or 510548

Email: [Committee@uttlesford.gov.uk](mailto:Committee@uttlesford.gov.uk)

**General Enquiries**

Council Offices, London Road, Saffron Walden, CB11 4ER

Telephone: 01799 510510

Fax: 01799 510550

Email: [uconnect@uttlesford.gov.uk](mailto:uconnect@uttlesford.gov.uk)

Website: [www.uttlesford.gov.uk](http://www.uttlesford.gov.uk)



**HOUSING BOARD held at COMMITTEE ROOM - COUNCIL OFFICES,  
LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, ESSEX CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY,  
14 MARCH 2019 at 10.00 am**

Present: Councillor M Felton (Chairman)  
Councillors A Dean and P Lees

Officers in attendance: A Bochel (Democratic Services Officer), S Payne (Local Plan Project Manager), J Snares (Housing Strategy and Operations Manager) and M Watts (Environmental Health Manager - Protection)

## HB18 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Farthing, Gerard, Loughlin, Mills, Ranger and Redfern, and Carole Mandy of the Tenants Forum.

## HB19 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2018 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record of the meeting.

## HB20 **CONSULTANT'S BRIEF FOR FUTURE HOUSING STRATEGY AND ALLOCATIONS POLICY**

The Local Plan Project Manager gave a summary of the report, which considered a draft Consultant's Brief for work on the future Uttlesford Housing Strategy and Allocations Policy. He said the report focused on how to plan for the three new garden communities, and it was important to do this correctly in order to plan for affordable housing. This was an opportunity to do something different, and it was fundamental to look at all strands of policy and understand how the Housing Policy could be used to achieve the Council's fundamental objectives.

Councillor Dean said he supported this piece of work, but the Council would need advice on how it was delivered. He suggested that the strategy include mention that it was key to ensure a supply of affordable housing throughout the district, rather than just the three new garden communities.

The Local Plan Project Manager said it was important not to have a two tier system of housing between the garden communities and other locations, and that he would look into including mention of this in the strategy.

In response to a Member question, the Local Plan Project Manager said the developers who the Council was working with on the garden communities had been required to sign a Quality and Collaboration Agreement with the Council to ensure development took place to the standards required by the Council.

In response to a Member question, the Local Plan Project Manager said each garden community would have different needs in terms of its residents and their supporting employment.

In response to a Member question, the Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said a Downsizing Policy would be a part of the Housing Strategy. The Local Plan Project Manager said a section specifically about downsizing could be added to the brief.

Councillor Dean said it was important to have mechanisms in place to maintain the affordable housing supply.

APPROVED to endorse the brief appended to the report so that work can commence on preparing the evidence for the refresh of the Uttlesford Housing Strategy and amendments to the Allocations Policy.

## HB21 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING UPDATE

The Environmental Health Manager – Protection gave an update on private sector housing:

- The Council had now got an improved range of powers to deal with rogue landlords. It could now issue civil penalties of up to £30000 for each offence. This could be used as an alternative tool for prosecution which could be long-winded.
- A new definition of Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) had been introduced. The Council had now licenced 13 and there was still work to do to find others. Fines could be issued for not coming forward to register as a HMO.
- A national review of Disabled Facilities Grants was underway, looking at the way financial allocations were made to each council. Uttlesford District Council were employing an Occupational Therapist on a temporary basis for one day a week to work as part of a pilot exercise to look at ways grants could be used to ensure that those who used the grants were able to look after themselves, such as rapid changes for entry into properties. The Housing Board would receive a review of this pilot after a year.
- Work on empty houses was progressing as normal. A Compulsory Purchase Order had been issued, but the landlord was now progressing with the work as requested.

## HB22 DEVELOPMENT SITE - SAFFRON WALDEN

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager gave a summary of the report, which detailed proposals to purchase a development site in Saffron Walden from the General Fund for use for an affordable housing scheme. She said the scheme would pay for itself over 30-35 years. The department had negotiated a price at the lower end of the range of what the site was worth.

APPROVED to recommends that the development site in Thaxted Road, Saffron Walden is transferred from the General Fund to the Housing Revenue Account for the consideration of £1.02million, subject to planning permission being secured for a scheme suitable for affordable housing.

## HB23 **DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager gave a verbal development update.

Hatherley Court – Phase 1 was now complete and tenants had moved in. It was hoped that Phase 2 would be complete by the end of the year.

Frambury Lane and Newton Grove – these sites were progressing. The latter's car park was now complete. Properties were now up to the first floor, and it was hoped they would be finished in July.

Walden Place – Officers were looking at detaching the listed building from the sheltered accommodation scheme. The plans were being re-examined and it might be that less existing flats had to be demolished and more could be added on.

The Moors – This site had been hit by planning delays but some issues had now been ironed out. It was hoped to have an application heard by the Planning Committee in April.

Great Chesterford site – the Council was looking at buying and developing a site to develop council housing. Cabinet had already approved this as it had been necessary to act to buy the site at short notice, but the decision was subject to satisfactory change to the planning application.

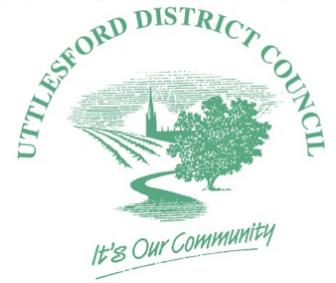
## HB24 **DRAFT TENANCY FRAUD POLICY**

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager introduced the draft Tenancy Fraud policy.

Members noted the draft policy.

The meeting closed at 11.25.

This page is intentionally left blank



# **UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy**

**2020-2025**

## CONTENTS

Foreword from Housing Portfolio Holder

Introduction

Context

- National Context
- Local Context - Policy
- Local Context -Statistics

Local Services

Service Developments Since last Strategy

Strategic Priorities

Consultation and Engagement

Monitoring and Review

Action Plan

## Foreword by the Housing Portfolio Holder

There are few things more important in life than having a roof over your head. This is why your council has a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. It sets out our vision for preventing homelessness in the first place and then what we can do to help if it does happen.

This document sets out our key priorities for the district. It also considers the broader context, including the supply of new affordable housing, homes delivered through the councils emerging Local Plan and its Housing Strategy.

We recognise that for some people in Uttlesford access to an affordable home is challenging. For many residents even those homes classified as 'affordable homes' are still unaffordable. This is compounded by continuing austerity, welfare reform and uncertain economic times. We also understand that the reasons aren't always economic, especially for residents who already have complex needs which makes them more vulnerable to losing their accommodation.

Nationally the introduction by Government of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2018 has been an opportunity to look at our homelessness services afresh. We are fully committed to the principles of the Act, we have embraced early intervention to prevent homelessness wherever possible, we provide first class housing advice for people in need and we offer assistance to those in need or who are vulnerable.

We have friendly and supportive communities in Uttlesford. Our district is lucky in that we have never seen the rough sleeping problems experienced by many of our neighbours. However we must not be complacent and so will ensure that we have policies, programmes and solutions in place to keep people in their homes and find new suitable long and short term accommodation when needed.

No one authority has all the answers, we recognise that working together is fundamental. The council has a dedicated and experienced team of housing options officers that work hard for residents. They know that through partnership with other statutory agencies and local organisation they can deliver a strategy that will be successful in the years ahead.

As a team we look forward to continuing to work with all people involved in preventing and tackling homelessness in Uttlesford

Cllr Petrina Lees  
Portfolio Holder Housing Health and Communities  
Uttlesford District Council

## Introduction

The Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy, which set out their vision for halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027, was published by the Ministry Of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in August 2018. Uttlesford within the national context has low levels of homelessness and is in the fortunate position of not having a rough sleeping problem, however the council cannot be complacent, homelessness affects lives and life chances and one rough sleeper must be considered one too many.

This strategy looks at the national and local context for homelessness and rough sleeping, the work the council has been doing since the last Homelessness Strategy and sets out the council's strategic priorities for tackling homelessness and rough sleeping over the next 5 years.

## National Context

Nationally accepted homelessness applications have increased by 19,000 from the low point in 2009/10 to almost 57,000 by 2017/18.

The main causes of homelessness nationally remains static

- Parents, other relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate (28%)
- Loss of rented or tied accommodation due to termination of assured shorthold tenancy (25%)
- Violent breakdown of relationship involving partner (12%)
- Other reason (e.g. homeless in emergency, sleeping rough or in hostel returned from abroad) (7%)
- Non-violent breakdown of relationship (6%)
- Loss of rented or tied accommodation other than termination of assured shorthold tenancy (6%)

At the end of March 2018 the number of households in temporary accommodation arranged by a local authority under their homelessness duties stood at just under 80,000, an increase of 66% from the low of just over 48,000 in December 2010, with many having been trapped for years in what is often unstable, overcrowded accommodation far from previous support networks

During the same period the estimated number of rough sleepers in England has increased each year since 2010. The autumn 2010 estimated snapshot for a single night was 1,768 while the autumn 2017 total was more than two and a half times as high, at 4,751. This has been recognised by Government, who have committed to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminating it altogether by 2027 and have required all local authorities to have a rough sleeping strategy in place by the end of 2019.

Contributing factors that have led to this national picture of increasing homelessness includes:

- High housing demand and a lack of supply leading to high house prices and private rents with greater shortfalls between rents and Local Housing Allowance
- Shortage of social housing or truly affordable 'affordable housing' to rent
- Increasing household bills
- Cuts and reforms to welfare benefits
- Cuts in funding to statutory and voluntary services which support vulnerable people

It is within this context of rising homelessness and rough sleeping that the Government supported a Private Members Bill in parliament that resulted in a significant change in homelessness legislation. The Homelessness Reduction Act was introduced in England in April 2018.

The major change in the new legislation is the integration of prevention and relief into a local authority's statutory duty. From April 2018 prevention and relief are available to any household vulnerable to homelessness in 56 rather than 28 days' time. This broader definition of homelessness beyond priority need groups means that more information will be available on some households that are currently considered the 'hidden homeless.' In the longer term, it will enable Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government to report on what prevention activities actually work for those at risk of homelessness.

The Act places new duties on councils to:

- Intervene at earlier stages to prevent homelessness
- Provide homelessness services to everyone threatened with homelessness regardless of whether they have a 'priority need'
- Create and monitor individual Personal Housing Plans for all homeless applicants within the Prevention and Relief duties
- Identify reasonable steps to be taken by the council and the applicant to help them secure accommodation to either prevent or relieve their homelessness
- Not to consider local connection or intentionality until after the council has tried to prevent or relieve homelessness
- Place the current statutory homelessness duty (main duty) at the end of the homeless process following attempts to 'prevent' and 'relieve' homelessness

The Act also places a duty on specified public bodies to refer clients they are working with who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

The Homelessness Reduction Act is one part of the Governments continuing national agenda to tackle the root causes of homelessness and drive through change in the housing sector. There is recognition within Government that there is

not one single solution to end rough sleeping or tackle the increase in homelessness. A strategic approach to tackling the causes of homelessness and the health and well-being of rough sleepers is as important as the supply of affordable homes and supported housing.

Future regulation, policy change are likely to be driven by:

- Housing White Paper (2017)
- Social Housing Green Paper (2018)
- Licensing of Homes in Multiple Occupation (2018)
- Rough Sleeping Strategy (2018)
- Tenant Fees Act 2019
- Private Landlords (Registration) Bill 2017-19
- Lifting of council borrowing caps to encourage council house building

### The Local Context - Policy

The priorities of Uttlesford District Council's corporate plan not only recognises the importance of delivering more affordable homes for the district but the need for the council's actions and influence to contribute to the economic growth of the district, to protect the character of Uttlesford and to be at its most effective when working closely with others.

Sitting alongside the draft Local Plan and its ambition for delivering 3 new garden communities within the district, the council's current Housing Strategy and the new draft one that will be delivered in 2020, contain high level objectives supported by operational policies and related strategies, including this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. This is also driving the need to review of the council's Allocations Policy in 2020/21.

The Government announced on the 3 October 2018 the borrowing restrictions on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) will be removed enabling councils to play a key role in delivering the homes their communities need. In light of this change the council has been looking at the range of initiatives it has to deliver additional housing and how it can respond to the change in legislation to accelerate delivery and increase the amount of housing delivered in the district.

The council is already committed to a development programme to build more council housing, to increase the supply of social housing available to those who are homeless and those on the council's housing register, and will be using the new flexibilities to support expansion of this programme. However, any borrowing undertaken will need to be prudent, affordable and sustainable and work is being undertaken on the 30 year HRA financial plan to ensure that the borrowing is affordable for the HRA.

The council, where appropriate, will also look to make use of grant funding from Homes England for the delivery of new social housing. The council has been confirmed as an Investment Partner with Homes England for 2019/20 on the basis of previous delivery performance and good standing.

The links within and between the council’s various policies and strategies that relate to housing, will ensure that a combined approach to housing is taken across the district. This will include the mix of housing tenures and affordability within the new garden communities, the use and expansion of the council’s existing stock, the council’s duties to those who are vulnerable and threatened with homelessness and the council’s future Housing Strategy and Allocations Policy. This strategy will sit alongside these documents to provide maximum benefit and support the overall aims and objectives of the council.

### The Local Context - Statistics

Uttlesford District Council is a stock holding council with 2,850 properties scattered across 56 parishes in what is the largest geographical district in the county of Essex. The district has a population of around 83,500 (2014 figure). As well as the council stock there is Registered Social Landlord (RSL) stock of approximately 2,000 properties.

The average private market 2 bed house price across the district is £316,100 (Hometrack July 2019) whilst 60% of residents earn less than £34,000 and of these 40% earn less than £25,000.

The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) (example below in Table 1) across the district does not match the private sector rents, meaning that many people who rely on benefits to help with their rent have a weekly/monthly shortfall to make up.

Table 1 Local Housing Allowance Rates North Uttlesford

Number of Bedrooms	Category	Weekly Amount	Monthly Amount
Shared Room Rate	A	£80.52	£349.88
1 Bedroom	B	£133.72	£581.05
2 Bedrooms	C	£153.79	£668.25
3 Bedrooms	D	£178.71	£776.54
4 Bedrooms	E	£238.38	£1035.82

LHA rates for North Uttlesford 2019/20

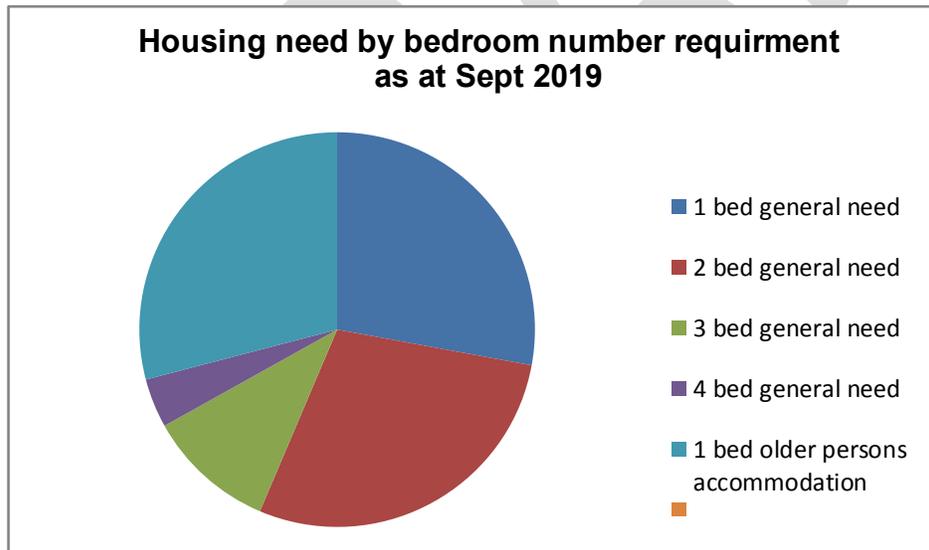
- Single rooms in the Saffron Walden area advertised in July 2019 ranged from £410 per month to £750 per month
- 2 bed flats in the Saffron Walden area advertised in July 2019 ranged from £775 to £1200 per month – well outside LHA

In 2018/19 Uttlesford delivered 515 new affordable homes across the district, 460 through the council’s RSL partners and 55 through the council’s development programme.

In spite of the new housing that has been delivered in the past 2 years and allocating a record 502 void properties in 2018/19, the housing register has remained static. As at 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019 there were 1,145 applications on the register.

Figure 1 below shows the number of applications on the housing register at a given date and the size of accommodation that is required by bedroom number. It is clear that for general needs accommodation the demand is for smaller units of accommodation. This data is used to determine the councils own development programme and future housing requirements to be delivered by RSL partners through the planning process on new developments within the district.

Figure 1 Housing Need by bedroom number requirement



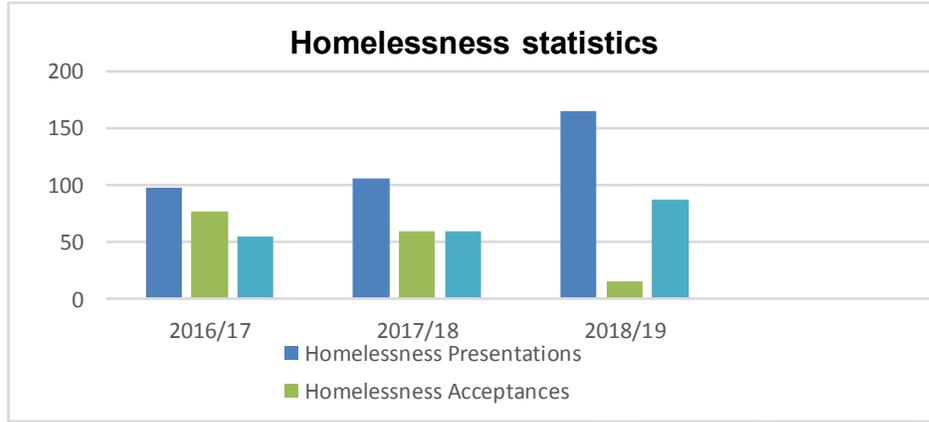
Council Housing Register data Sept 2019

Figure 2 shows the number of homeless applications the council has taken in the past three years and the number of those applications for which the council has accepted the full homelessness duty – to find them permanent housing.

The chart clearly demonstrates that with the introduction of the Homelessness reduction Act the number of homelessness applications has increased, however the number of those accepted as homeless has decreased. The emphasis on

preventing and relieving homelessness sees the council working closely with clients and partner agencies to find affordable housing solutions before applicants become actually homeless and requiring temporary accommodation.

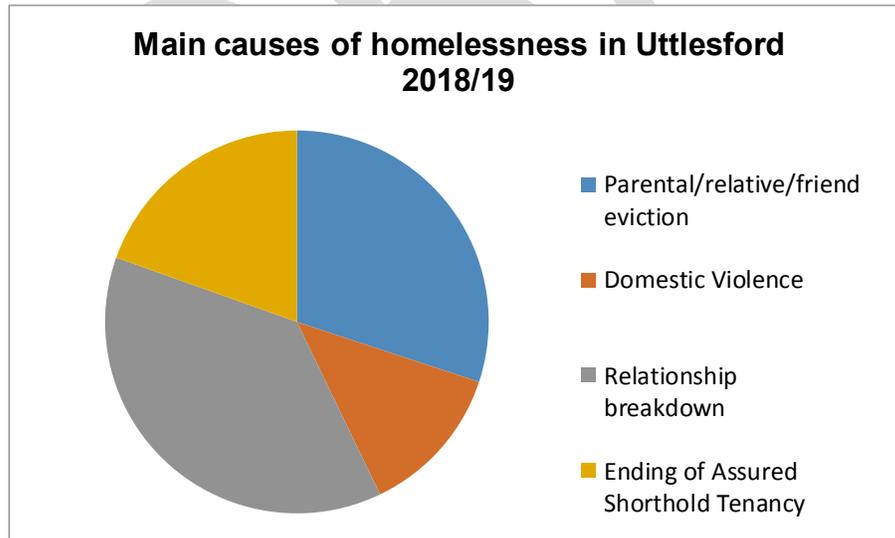
Figure 2 Homelessness Statistics 2016 - 2019



Council KPI data

Figure 3 shows the main causes for homelessness within Uttlesford over the past year. These four main causes have remained static for many years and follow the National trends. The main cause as can be seen is family and friends no longer willing to accommodate other households within their properties. This is indicative of these households struggling to obtain or sustain their own affordable housing in either the private rented or owner occupied sector.

Figure 3 Main Causes of Homelessness



HCLIC data from council system

The ending of Assured Shorthold Tenancies remains another common reason for people approaching the council as threatened with homelessness, with the local levels of LHA being substantially lower than actual private rents in the district, it is

hard for people losing one private rented property to source another at a rent they can afford.

This is why it is also difficult for the council to prevent homelessness by using the private sector. For many of the clients seen by the Housing Options service, an affordable rented property from either the council or partner RSL is their only realistic affordable housing option. Whilst the council's Housing Strategy aims to increase the provision of affordable housing within the district, the council will also continue to work with private landlords and to help tenants who are in precarious housing situations sustain their accommodation.

The numbers of rough sleepers within the district has always been historically low. The estimated numbers for rough sleeping in Uttlesford was 0 as at November 2018 (date of last estimated count) and has fluctuated between 0 and 3 at the estimated counts during the life of the previous strategy. It is however important the council does not become complacent about this situation and acts immediately on any reports of rough sleeping that are received. The council is committed to ensuring that rough sleeping does not become an issue in the district and that the council is ready to work with any rough sleepers to find sustainable long term housing solutions for them.

## Local Services

The council has access to services within Uttlesford to assist us in preventing homelessness and rough sleeping the principle ones being:

- Young person homelessness support services from Essex County Council (ECC). This includes working to the Essex wide Joint Protocol on 16/17 year olds
- Floating Support Services from Peabody
- Domestic Abuse services from Next Chapter
- Tenancy management for council and RSL stock
- Housing Benefit Visiting Officer/ Welfare Officer
- DWP support
- Probation/Community Rehabilitation Company
- ECC Adult AND Children Services
- Community Mental Health Services
- Addiction Services – Open Road and ADAS
- Bromfield House Supported Housing Scheme
- Railway Meadow Mother and Baby Unit – nomination rights to 4 bed spaces

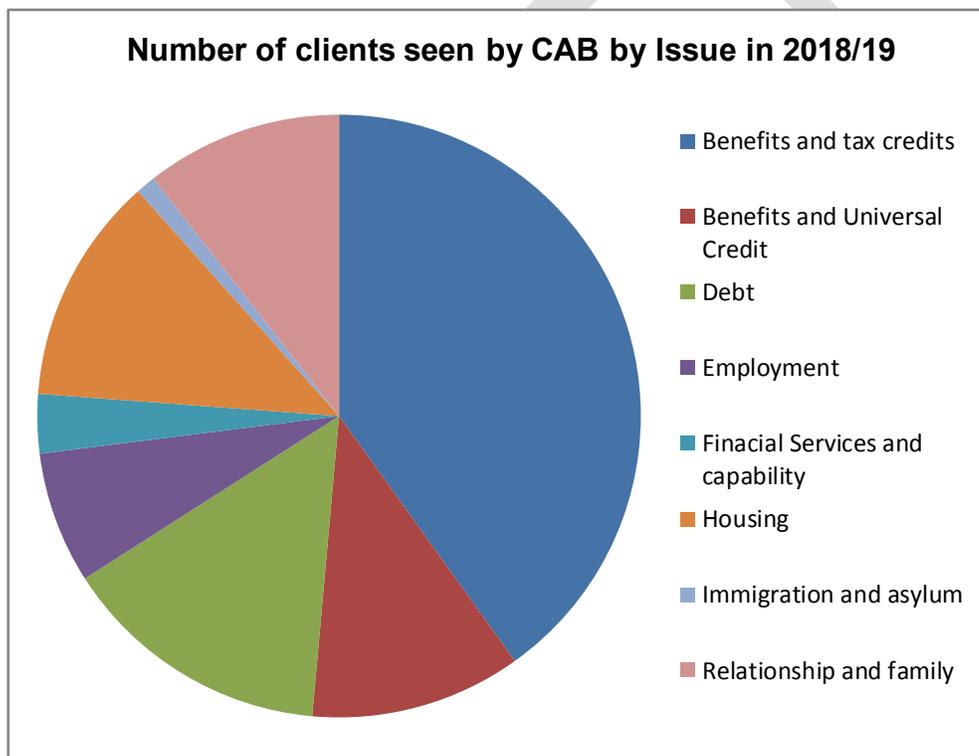
There are also independent voluntary sector services within Uttlesford, some that receive council grant funding that also support council offices in their work on preventing and relieving homelessness.

Voluntary Sector Services include:

- Uttlesford Citizens Advice Bureau
- Uttlesford Food Bank - the foodbank has given out over 3600 parcels in the past 5 years, with over 1000 of these in the past 9 months
- Saffron Walden United Charities
- Faith groups

As can be seen by the above data Uttlesford CAB are an important partner for the council in assisting Uttlesford residents with issues that can lead to homelessness, including problems with debt and benefits, as well as more general housing and relationship issues.

Figure 4 Uttlesford Citizens Advice Client Data 2018 -2019



Data from Uttlesford CAB

## Service Developments since the Last Strategy

With the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act the council recognised that its approach to homelessness would require a new focus to meet the requirements of the Act. There has been corporate support to ensure homelessness funding has been used solely to implement the changes needed to ensure that the council can provide effective homelessness services both now and into the future.

Since the last Homelessness Strategy the council has:

- Relunched the council's Homelessness Partnership ensuring that representation from all agencies both statutory and non statutory that have a role in helping us tackle homelessness and rough sleeping within the district are around the table
- Used government grant funding to create additional Housing Options/ Homelessness Prevention Officer roles.
- Added additional council stock into the council's portfolio of temporary accommodation to ensure that Bed and Breakfast is used for only the direst emergency situations
- Installed a new homelessness prevention module into the council's Choice Based Lettings IT System to help the Housing Options Team reconfigure the homelessness service in light of the Homelessness Reduction Act. The system allows for the production of effective statistics to meet new statutory reporting requirements. The new module also allows potentially homeless clients to access their personalised housing plan that the council's Housing Options Team creates with them, from an online portal. The plan details the actions that the council will take and actions that they can take to try to prevent or relieve their homelessness
- Continued to accommodate rough sleepers past the provision of the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) in order to co-ordinate work with agencies to end their rough sleeping.
- Increased the council's own housing stock by over 100 properties and enabled the development of 518 new affordable RSL rented homes
- Provided financial assistance to over 20 households to secure or maintain private rented accommodation

The Homelessness Reduction Act has resulted in a culture change for staff as well as clients. Although people can now present to the council within 56 days of potentially being homeless the Housing Options Team are finding that people are still leaving it later than this before they approach us for advice.

The emphasis is much greater now on working alongside the client to prevent homelessness and find a housing solution without the need, initially at least, to decide 'is this person in priority need or are they intentionally homeless'.

The situation remains difficult as far as finding alternative housing for people is concerned, as the private rented sector continues to be unaffordable within this area for most of the people the team are seeing. It is therefore essential that if the council is to effectively tackle homelessness and maintain the low levels of rough sleeping that the council ensures that the supply of affordable housing is maintained.

## Strategic Priorities for the Next Five Years

The following priorities have been developed alongside the key priorities within the council's Corporate Plan and the council's Housing Strategy:

1. Improve the effectiveness the council's homelessness prevention work by investing in the service to ensure the council is providing high quality housing advice to clients in all housing tenures
2. Aim to end all use of bed and breakfast accommodation by investing in and facilitating the delivery of good quality affordable housing and suitable temporary accommodation
3. Work with partners and other stakeholders to prevent homelessness by intervening at the earliest opportunity
4. Work to maintain Uttlesford as an area without rough sleeping by ensuring that the causes of rough sleeping are not ignored

### **Priority 1: Improve the effectiveness of the council's homelessness prevention work by investing in the service to ensure the council is providing high quality housing advice to clients in all housing tenures**

To meet this priority the council will:

- Ensure that the principles of and ethos behind the Homelessness Reduction Act are fully embedded within the council's housing options service
- Ensure that those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness receive a personal Housing Plan and that reasonable steps are identified to help them resolve their housing situation
- Develop good quality, easily accessible housing advice materials, including web based material which reflect the diversity of applicants needs and abilities and provide for these to be delivered in different formats and at different locations
- Provide regular training opportunities to staff to maintain and enhance their knowledge and skills
- Prevent homelessness by helping people sustain their tenancies across all tenure through the increased provision of debt and welfare advice
- Work with partner agencies to mitigate the effects of Universal Credit and the Benefit Cap
- Flexible use of the council's homelessness prevention fund
- Flexible use of the Discretionary Housing Payments

**Priority 2: Aim to end all use of bed and breakfast accommodation by investing in and facilitating the delivery of good quality affordable housing and suitable temporary accommodation**

To meet this priority the council will:

- Ensure that enough ready to access temporary accommodation is available in the right location for homeless households to access support, maintain employment and education
- Ensure through the council's Housing Strategy that the council is able to deliver sufficient units of social housing to allow the free flow of households from temporary accommodation into permanent housing
- Ensure through the council's Housing Strategy that the council is able to deliver suitable supported housing for homeless households with complex needs, particularly single homeless households
- Promote the council's incentive scheme which encourages households under-occupying in council stock to downsize to smaller properties
- Identify opportunities for the council to develop new affordable housing on its own land or through working with Registered Providers and private developers

**Priority 3: Work with partners and other stakeholders to prevent homelessness by intervening at the earliest opportunity**

To meet this priority the council will:

- Continue to build effective working relationships with other agencies through the Homelessness partnership
- Promote the duty to refer under the Homelessness Reduction Act and have a dedicated email address for these referrals
- Refer tenants within the private sector to appropriate support agencies to help them maintain their tenancies when difficulties first arise
- Have closer links between the Housing Options Team and the Housing Benefit Department
- Review the council's Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme to see if it can provide greater incentives for private sector landlords to work with the scheme
- Continue to encourage owners of empty properties to bring them back into use
- Continue to hold a Landlords Forum and review other ways to connect with landlords

#### **Priority 4: Work to maintain Uttlesford as an area without rough sleeping by ensuring that the causes of rough sleeping are not ignored**

To meet this priority the council will:

- Respond to reports of rough sleeping within 24hours and ensure that this response engages with the rough sleeper
- Commit to engaging with all rough sleepers to develop a Personalized Housing Plan that seeks to help them find a sustainable solution to end their homelessness
- Accommodate rough sleepers in line with the severe weather emergency protocol
- Develop closer links to voluntary and community agencies such as the foodbank, faith based organisations or local charities to promote an effective local response to anyone found rough sleeping in Uttlesford
- Work through the members of the Homelessness Partnership and other key agencies to prevent individuals and families from getting into a housing crisis
- Work with health partners to ensure that homeless households and linked into appropriate health services
- Make appropriate referrals to support agencies to ensure homeless households have access to support that meets all their needs
- Data sharing and data analysis with statutory and voluntary partners
- Review and strengthen existing protocols and implement new ones particularly with mental health, drug and alcohol services and probation

### **Consultation and Engagement**

In preparing this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy the council has worked with a wide range of staff, elected members, partners and stakeholders to ensure that the document is shaped to reflect legislation as well as national and local priorities.

Consultation has been undertaken to get the views of as many people and organisations as possible to inform the development of this strategy. A draft document was circulated for comment and put out for public consultation via the council's website.

This has included work through the Homelessness Partnership

The final document will be agreed by the council's Housing Board prior to being recommended to the council's Cabinet for adoption.

## Monitoring and review

How the council will deliver the priorities within this Strategy is contained within the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan which sets out clear tasks and targets within identified areas of work. The Action Plan will be monitored and reviewed annually by the Homelessness Partnership, with regular reports being presented to the council's Housing Board.

As the Housing Options Team, continues to implement the Homelessness Reduction Act new trends and learning will emerge. By regularly reviewing the Action Plan the council can be responsive to these emerging needs and set new actions to ensure strategic priorities are achieved.

The Strategy and Action plan will also be reviewed in light of any changes to national legislation and policy.

By adopting this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, Uttlesford Council is making a firm commitment to tackling and preventing homelessness within the district and ensuring that Uttlesford continues to be an area where incidences of rough sleeping are tackled as soon as they are identified.

If you require any further information about the Uttlesford District Council Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 – 2025, please contact Thee Housing Options/Homelessness Team on 01799 510510 or email [housingoptions@uttlesford.gov.uk](mailto:housingoptions@uttlesford.gov.uk) or write to:-

Housing Options/Homelessness Team  
Uttlesford District Council  
Council Offices  
London Road  
Saffron Walden  
Essex  
CB11 4ER

## Action Plan – Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 – 2025

<b>Priority 1: Improve the effectiveness of the council’s homelessness prevention work by investing in the service to ensure the council is providing high quality housing advice to clients in all housing tenures</b>					
<b>How this priority will be achieved</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Resources</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Key Officer</b>	<b>Comments /Progress</b>
Ensure that the principles of and ethos behind the Homelessness Reduction Act are fully embedded within the housing options service	Dec 2019 and ongoing	Within current resources	Housing Options Team fully compliant with HRAct	Housing Options Team Leader	
Ensure that those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness receive a personal Housing Plan and that reasonable steps are identified to help them resolve their housing situation	Dec 2019 and ongoing	Within current resources	Homelessness prevention numbers increase year on year	Housing Options Team Leader	
Develop good quality, easily accessible housing advice materials, including web based material which reflect the diversity of applicants needs and abilities and provide for these to be delivered in different formats and at different locations	Dec 2020 and ongoing	Within current resources	Up to date and accurate information accessible to clients	Housing Options and Housing Management team leaders	
Provide regular training opportunities to staff to maintain and enhance their knowledge and skills	Ongoing	Within current resources	Staff fully trained to be able to deliver first class service	Housing Options Team Leader	
Prevent homelessness by helping people sustain their tenancies across all tenure through the increased provision of debt and welfare advice	Ongoing	Within current resources	Homelessness prevention numbers increase year on year	Housing Options Team Leader	

Work with partner agencies to mitigate the effects of Universal Credit and the Benefit Cap	Ongoing	Within current resources	Clients directed to best available solutions	Housing Options Team Leader	
Flexible use of the council's homelessness prevention fund	Ongoing	Within current resources and use of futures government funding	Clients accessing best available housing solutions	Housing Options Team Leader	
Flexible use of the Discretionary Housing Payments by working with the HB department	Ongoing	Within existing resources and future government funding	DHP money fully utilized by the authority	Housing Options Team Leader and Benefits Manager	
<b>Priority 2: Aim to end all use of bed and breakfast accommodation by investing in and facilitating the delivery of good quality affordable housing and suitable temporary accommodation</b>					
Ensure that enough ready to access temporary accommodation is available in the right location for homeless households to access support, maintain employment and education	Dec 2020 and ongoing	Within current resources	Only exceptional use of B and B required	Housing Strategy/ Operations Manager	
Ensure through the council's Housing Strategy that the council is able to deliver suitable supported housing for homeless households with complex needs, particularly single homeless households	Ongoing	Within current resources	Only exceptional use of B and B required	Housing Strategy/ Operations Manager	

Promote the council's incentive scheme which encourages households under-occupying in council stock to downsize to smaller properties	Dec 2020 and ongoing	Within current resources	Tenants housed in suitable sized properties	Housing management team Leader	
Identify opportunities for the council to develop new affordable housing on its own land or through working with Registered Providers and private developers	Ongoing	Within current resources	Year on year development program in place	Housing Strategy/ Operations Manager	
<b>Priority 3: Work with partners and other stakeholders to prevent homelessness by intervening at the earliest opportunity</b>					
Continue to build effective working relationships with other agencies through the Homelessness partnership	Partnership meetings held quarterly	Within current resources			
Promote the duty to refer under the Homelessness Reduction Act and have a dedicated email address for these referrals	Dec 2020 and ongoing	Within current resources	Referral being received from all statutory partners in timely manner	Housing Options Team Leader	
Refer tenants within the private sector to appropriate support agencies to help them maintain their tenancies when difficulties first arise	April 2020 and ongoing	Within current resources	Reduced number of applicants presenting as homeless from the private sector	Housing Options Team Leader	

Have closer links between the Housing Options Team and the Housing Benefit Department	Dec 2019 and ongoing	Within current resources	Regular monthly meetings being held between departments	Housing Options Team Leader	
Review the council's Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme to see if it can provide greater incentives for private sector landlords to work with the scheme	Dec 2020	Within current resources	Increased uptake of Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme	Housing Options Team Leader	
Continue to encourage owners of empty properties to bring them back into use	Dec 2020	Within existing resources	No empty homes within district where there is not a plan for their future use	Empty Homes and Private Sector Housing Officer	
Continue to hold a Landlords Forum and review other ways to connect with landlords	Annually	Within existing resources	Information easily accessible to Private landlords. Annual Forum held. Increases prevention work within the private sector	Empty Homes and Private Sector Housing Officer Housing Options Team Leader	

<b>Priority 4: Work to maintain Uttlesford as an area without rough sleeping by ensuring that the causes of rough sleeping are not ignored</b>					
Respond to reports of rough sleeping within 24hours and ensure that this response engages with the rough sleeper	Ongoing	Within existing resources	Rough sleepers within Uttlesford are supported out of rough sleeping	Housing Options Team Leader	
Commit to engaging with all rough sleepers to develop a Personalised Housing Plan that seeks to help them find a sustainable solution to end their homelessness	Dec 2020 and ongoing	Within existing resources	Rough sleepers within Uttlesford are supported out of rough sleeping	Housing Options Team Leader	
Accommodate rough sleepers in line with the severe weather emergency protocol.	Ongoing	Within existing resources	Rough Sleepers accommodat ed in line with severe weather emergency protocol	Housing Options Team Leader	
Develop closer links to voluntary and community agencies such as the foodbank, faith based organisations or local charities to promote an effective local response to anyone found rough sleeping in Uttlesford	Dec 2020 and ongoing	Within existing resources	Rough sleepers within Uttlesford are supported out of rough sleeping	Housing Options Team Leader	

Work with members of the Homelessness Partnership and other key agencies to prevent individuals and families from getting into a housing crisis	Partnership meetings held quarterly	Within existing resources	Homelessness prevention numbers increase year on year	Housing Options Team Leader	
Work with health partners to ensure that homeless households and linked into appropriate health services	Ongoing	Within existing resources	Homeless applicants have access to health care services	Housing Options Team Leader	
Make appropriate referrals to support agencies to ensure homeless households have access to support that meets all their needs	Ongoing	Within existing resources	Homeless applicants have all necessary support to resolve their homelessness	Housing Options Team Leader	
Data sharing and data analysis with statutory and voluntary partners	Ongoing	Within existing resources	Good flow of statistical information to better focus services	Housing Strategy and Operations Manager	

**Committee:** Housing Board

**Agenda Item**

**Date:** 21 November 2019

**[?]**

**Title:** Housing Revenue Account - Proposed  
Rent, Service and Support Charge increase  
2020/21

**Author:** Roz Millership – Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services  
Angela Knight – Assistant Director Finance

Item for decision

---

## Summary

1. This report sets out 2020/21 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) changes in dwelling rents, garage rents, housing related support (HRS) charges and service charges
2. The recommendations will be discussed by the Tenants forum on 14 November 2019.
3. The Housing Board and Tenants forums recommendations will be reviewed by Scrutiny Committee on 4 February 2020 prior to approval by Cabinet on 13 February 2020 and referral to Full Council on 25 February 2020.

## Recommendations

4. The Housing Board is requested to recommend to Cabinet for approval increases in HRA dwelling rents as detailed below:
  - General needs accommodation - a 2.7% increase in rent as per central government policy
  - Supported accommodation - a 2.7% increase in rent as per central government policy
  - All dwelling rents to be revised to the formula rent level when the property is re-let
5. The Housing Board is requested to recommend to Cabinet for approval the increases in garage rent, support and service charges as detailed below:
  - Garage rents are increased by RPI of 2.4%
  - Housing related support charges are increased in line with actual costs
  - Intensive housing management charges are increased in line with actual costs

- Lifeline charges remain the same.
- Heating, Service and Sewerage charges are increased in line with actual costs

### Financial Implications

6. The relevant financial implications are included in the body of the report.

### Background Papers

7. None

### Impact

- 8.

Communication/Consultation	Tenant Forum
Community Safety	None
Equalities	None
Health and Safety	None
Human Rights/Legal Implications	None
Sustainability	None
Ward-specific impacts	None
Workforce/Workplace	None

### Background

#### National Social Rent Policy

9. Since 2001, rents for properties let at ‘social rent’ have been set based on a formula set by government. This creates a ‘formula rent’ for each property, which is calculated based on the relative value of the property, relative local income levels, and the size of the property. An aim of this formula-based approach is to ensure that similar rents are charged for similar social rent properties.
10. In 2011, the government introduced ‘affordable rent’ which permits rents to be set at up to 80% of market rent. The policy allows the council to let new build properties at affordable rent where certain conditions apply.
11. The majority of the councils new build properties are let at affordable rent and the additional income makes it possible to build more homes.
12. In October 2017, government announced its intention to set a long term rent deal for social housing landlords in England. This new policy permits annual rent increases on both social rent and affordable rent properties of up to consumer price index (CPI) plus one percentage point from 2020, for a period of at least five years.

13. Rents are set in line with Government policy and to that end the council's social and affordable rents have been modelled at CPI+1% from 2020/21. The business plan fundamentally requires this level of increase to take place to remain viable following a period of 4 years during which there has been an annual reduction in all social rents of 1% in line with Government requirements.
14. It is proposed that the council continue with the policy of where rent is still not at the formula rent level that the rent be revised to the formula rent level when the property is re-let.

### **Financial Impact on annual rental income**

15. This will give all tenants a 2.7% increase in their current rent. The average rent in 2019/20 was budgeted as £97.78 however the actual average rent as at September 2019 was £98.18. In 2020/21 the average rent will increase to £100.84.

### **Garage rents**

16. The Council manages a total of 450 garages, of these 305 are rented by private residents. It is proposed to increase the garage rents by RPI of 2.4% (as at September 2019). The current weekly rent is £10.62 and this will increase to £10.87 (excluding VAT) per week for 2020/21.

- i. Garage rent: **£10.87 (exc. VAT) per week**

### **Housing Related Support (HRS) charges and Intensive Housing Management (IHM) charges**

17. In 2017 the council reviewed all support and housing management charges in preparation for further cuts to HRS funding made by Essex County Council (ECC).
18. The review resulted in the introduction of an Intensive Housing Management (IHM) charge to recover a proportion of the reduction in funding from ECC. The IHM charge is covered by Housing Benefit and its introduction therefore lessened the impact of the cuts to HRS for those tenants on benefits who previously had not contributed to support costs.
19. All HRS funding from ECC ceased from April 2017 and the cost of support and intensive housing management is now recovered in full from all sheltered tenants. The rationale that ECC made for these cuts is that people who require this type of support can claim appropriate benefits to pay for it themselves.
20. It is proposed to continue to calculate the charges for the council's sheltered housing scheme management service (made up from IHM and HRS) in line with actual costs. The charges to be set at:

i) Intensive Housing Management (IHM): **£15.24 per week**

ii) Housing Related Support (HRS): **£5.92 per week**

**TOTAL CHARGE: £21.16 per week**

### **Lifeline Service**

**21.** It is proposed charges for the council's Lifeline service are not raised by inflation this year. This is because any increase in charges may result in further losses of service users to more competitively price providers who now operate in the district. It should be noted that many of the competitors springing up in the district do not offer the same levels of service that the council provides however for some service users price is the main influencing matter in choosing a telecare service

i) Lifeline service: **£4.45 (exc VAT) per week**

ii) Lifeline service plus extra sensors: **£5.45 (exc VAT) per week**

### **Heating, service and sewerage charges**

**22.** The Council manages leasehold and freehold properties where service and sewerage charges are payable and these will continue to be calculated and charged in line with actual costs.

**23.** General needs and sheltered housing service and sewerage charges are calculated on the same basis as Leasehold/freehold properties.

**24.** Heating charges will be calculated and charged in line with actual costs.

### **25. Risk Analysis**

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Not implementing the government's policy of rent increase	1 – the calculation of rents is always kept in line with Government guidance	2 – would result in the council being penalised financially at a later date	To include the proposed rental increase in the 2020/21 budget
Support charges are not passed on to the tenant	2 – all support charges are correctly accounted for and re-	3 - Financial risk to the HRA	Will need to look at further adjustments to the service

	charged		
--	---------	--	--

- 1 = Little or no risk or impact
- 2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.
- 3 = Significant risk or impact – action required
- 4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.

This page is intentionally left blank

## TENANT REGULATORY PANEL

### SHELTERED HOUSING REVIEW OF SERVICE STANDARDS 2019 REPORT

#### TENANT REGULATORY PANEL (TRP) MEMBERS

**Panel Chair:** Val Rogacs  
**Panel Members:** Angie Hutton  
Trevor Laws  
Diana Robinson

#### BACKGROUND

In 2014/15 the TRP carried out an extensive review of the service standards applied to all Uttlesford District Council's (UDC) sheltered housing schemes. The main objective of this review was to ensure residents fully understood the standards and that they were receiving the services and promises made by UDC to sheltered housing residents.

The TRP spoke with UDC officers to make sure they fully understood the principles introduced by UDC and how the day-to-day management structure operated.

Following the review, a detailed report was prepared making a number of recommendations where the service could be improved for the benefit of the sheltered housing residents.

#### 2019 REVIEW

As that report is now four years old, the TRP decided to review the recommendations. They spoke to UDC officers who manage the day to day service and, using the recommendations in the earlier report, prepared a list of spot checks and questions to ask the sheltered housing residents. The questions and responses are detailed later in this report.

#### OBJECTIVES

In view of the TRP's limited resources, it was decided to scrutinise some of the schemes based on the number of residents who had taken part in the original review, rather than review all the schemes. Those chosen were Alan Hasler House and Alexia House Great Dunmow, Priors Wood Court Takeley, Four Acres Saffron Walden and The Close, Broomfields Hatfield Heath.

#### ACTIONS TAKEN

Meeting with Fergus Simmonds, Sheltered Housing Team Leader, to discuss the project and any issues of safeguarding and confidentiality in relation to the residents.

A questionnaire was developed based on the recommendations in the original report.

The five schemes were identified based on the criteria set out above.

Individual letters of introduction were sent to the residents of all five schemes inviting them to attend a meeting or, if they preferred to speak privately to TRP members, to arrange separate meetings.

All members of the TRP visited at least one scheme and carried out spot checks where required and completed the questionnaires.

The responses were collated and scrutinised.

### **QUESTIONNAIRE DATA (Extracted from original report)**

Q1 **Service Standards** - spot check that these are displayed on noticeboards. Check with residents if they are aware these are also available in the Tenants' Handbook

Q2 **Kept Fully Informed** - Check with residents that they are invited to regular meetings and receive quarterly newsletters

Q3 **Safe from Abuse** - Safety of the facility - spot check external doors have intruder alarms which activate properly and that doors are not left ajar. Faults reported with 4-hour response and residents fully aware of the procedure

Q4 **Treated fairly** - this related to repairs issues so did not form part of the review

Q5 **Independence of choice** - did residents take part in the 2018 Customer Satisfaction Survey (providing they were resident at the time). If not check why. Are the results of the Survey on noticeboards? If residents requested a visit regarding a specific matter, did this happen?

Q6 **Swift response** - again this related to repairs issues so did not form part of the review

Q7 **Out of hours response** - have residents used this facility recently? Did a family member respond or someone else? Details of first contacts should be in the support plan. Are residents aware of this?

Q8 **Level of care received** - there is now only one level of care and families are involved but resident can opt out

Q9 **Opportunities** - is social inclusion encouraged. Do all residents get a copy of newsletters, What's On Where etc.

Q10 **Agreed support plan** - were residents offered a copy of this? If so, do they still have it? If not, are they aware that the document is held securely at the facility? (Note - UDC's current system is not able to cope with providing copies for all residents)

Q11 **Emergency calls** - key performance indicators (KPIs) are sent from Carecall to Fergus Simmonds and information should be on noticeboards. TRP suggested including details in an annual newsletter.

Q12 **Timely response to calls** - officers review monthly KPIs but family often respond quicker than Care Call so check with residents

### **Additional Questions**

**Literature published by UDC** - is this in plain English and easily understandable

**Noticeboards** - check at least one in each scheme, easily accessed by all residents who are able

**Parking** - are there any issues with car parking. Can residents and families easily park. If so, what action, if any, can be taken to resolve this

**Landscaping** - are there any issues with landscaping such as unsightly walls which could perhaps be shielded by planting

**Service charges** - check if residents receive a detailed summary of all items covered by service charges in their scheme

**Smoking** - are there any issues with smoking in communal areas. If complaints have been made, have they been dealt with adequately or appropriately

**Independent person for residents** - apart from family members, are residents aware of any other independent person who could assist them when dealing with UDC staff

**Laundry facilities** - are these adequate. If not, have complaints been made and have repairs been carried out or advice given when equipment is out of order

**Window cleaning** - is this taking place and satisfactory. If not are any complaints dealt with promptly. If window cleaning not supplied, how do residents manage.

### **Schemes Visited**

#### **Four Acres, Saffron Walden**

The visiting TRP member inspected notice boards and confirmed that a copy of the service standards handbook was displayed. However, no copy of the results of the Customer Satisfaction survey could be found.

**FS Response:** These were displayed on the notice board on the lounge door. I checked before your visits and have since checked again.

Residents are kept informed by information on noticeboards along with regular meetings and newsletters.

External doors are locked at 3.00pm. After which they can be accessed by fob. If external doors are left open/ajar no intruder alarms are set off and residents reported that the ground floor external door does not shut properly. Also there was an issue with a smoke alarm going off at regular intervals in one of the flats.

**FS Response:** External doors are locked at 1pm. Due to the layout of Four Acres and the fact we have 9 separate blocks having intruder alarms in place would not be feasible. Doors do become faulty as do smoke alarms but these are reported to repairs as soon as staff are aware.

The residents reported that out of hours responses are quite quick, but some would prefer to opt out of the care scheme.

**FS Response:** This is not an option and as part of living in sheltered accommodation this is what they agree to and forms part of the Sheltered Service Standards.

**Further feedback:** FS confirmed direct contact with all tenants could be made to increase security controls but is not currently done so. He confirmed most residents chose to opt out of the care scheme.

Some residents expressed an interest in having things like computer training which could possibly take place in the common room, as well as social events.

**FS Response:** Computer training was offered previously with little interest. We will put this to the residents again.

**Further feedback:** FS advised he did not have the resources to offer any other form of training or activity support (i.e. flower arranging). He suggested that SH Officers could sign-post residents to such activities which the group agreed to. He confirmed that social events need to be driven by residents, not council officers. He also advised the W.O.W. magazine is used to advertise events like these and is widely available to all residents.

There were also complaints that the newsletters contained religious views which they felt was inappropriate.

**FS response:** The newsletter is not produced by UDC but by a resident at Four Acres and we have no influence over it.

Residents had no complaints about emergency calls but were not aware these were reported as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

**Parking** as with most of the other schemes visited, there are problems, particularly unauthorised parking by members of the public, which can block access to residents' garages. It was felt that more notices were required to stop non authorised parking

**Landscaping** - the benches provided for residents need cleaning and re-varnishing

and grass cutting is only done once or twice a year.

**FS Response:** I am waiting for a reply from a community service to see if they can refurbish the benches. Grass cutting takes place approximately 10 times per annum.

**Further feedback:** FS advised that he had engaged with an external community service and that low-class offenders have been/will be involved with re-furbishing benches.

**Service charges** - no issues raised but residents would like to be updated on what service charges are and how much they are being charged for them

**Smoking** - the residents raised the issue of people sitting on their outside wall to smoke and then dropping cigarette butts on the ground. They particularly mentioned this being done by staff from another scheme and wondered if UDC could send a letter regarding this.

**FS Response:** Not sure who would we be sending a letter to? I would hope that none of my team would do this and without specifics I cannot directly address this but I will reiterate to all staff of the standards I expect.

**Further feedback:** GFS advised he was unsure of what he could do to influence or stop this behaviour as it is out of his control.

**Laundry facilities** - these were inspected and found to be very good. Residents did not raise any issues about these.

**Window cleaning** - residents reported this was done about twice a year.

**FS Response:** Quarterly

**Additional Remarks** - the socially active residents found it difficult to engage other residents in any UDC initiatives. They suggested this may be due to lack of interest by other residents along with frequent changes of tenancies. This makes it difficult to make newsletters interesting and relevant.

**FS Response:** This is probably true although we make every effort in encouraging residents from all schemes to interact with each other. We advertise these events (assuming we know about them) in our quarterly newsletter.

### **Alan Hasler House, Gt Dunmow**

The TRP visiting member met with a number of residents who responded to the questions as shown below. Spot checks were also carried out as set out in the questions above.

Notice boards were checked and all relevant information relating to service standards was displayed. Information also displayed signposting where residents can get help if they require it. Recreational events were advertised plus when service providers such as hairdressers would be calling. The noticeboards were

found to be accessible and contained a range of information.

All doors were secure at the time of the visit and residents were happy with the level of security this provided.

The results of the 2018 Customer Service Survey were displayed on the notice board. Residents confirmed they had taken part in the survey and all expressed satisfaction with their tenancy.

The individual support plans are kept securely in the office. They are checked annually with residents to make sure they are up to date.

As set out in Q8 above, residents are aware they can either opt in or out of the care service. Concerns were expressed that the warden was not available over weekends, so that level of care diminishes, especially if someone fell ill or had an accident and were not able to reach the cord to call for help.

**FS Response:** If a resident falls ill and they do not have their pendant on them the risk is the same regardless of whether there is an officer on duty.

**Further feedback:** TRP agreed you can only encourage residents to wear their pendants to ensure their safety if they fall ill.

Entertainments and clubs were advertised on noticeboards so residents, if they are able and wish to do so, can socialise.

The warden is usually the first responder to emergency calls but Care Call has list of people to call in these circumstances and, where necessary, will send out emergency services.

**Parking** - there were a number of complaints about car parking, including not enough of it exacerbated by non-residents sometimes parking which causes difficulty for less mobile residents. Satnav directs people the wrong way which has caused problems for visitors. A photograph is attached showing the problem with car parking. **See appendix ?**

No reported problems with landscaping.

**Service charges** - these include water, sewage and electricity but not gardening, cleaning or other maintenance. Residents are provided with a yearly breakdown of charges, but some still seemed unsure what they were paying for or recall even having received a breakdown.

**Smoking** - there were no reported problems with smoking as residents either smoked in their own flats or outside away from outer doors

**Laundry Facilities and Window Cleaning** - no problems reported with laundry facilities and outside of windows cleaning quarterly.

**Additional Remarks** - lifts frequently break down which leaves non mobile residents

trapped in their flats, in one instance for two weeks.

Slow door closures not working efficiently which means doors slam causing noise nuisance.

**FS Response:** All issues like this would be reported to repairs.

**Further feedback:** Lighter weight doors are now being fitted as repairs are required.

All residents present asked for wet rooms to be fitted as many had difficulty getting into and out of baths. There are some communal showers but residents prefer the privacy of their own flats.

Fire signs and procedures have been updated following the Grenfell Tower disaster.

As residents present said they were happy with their warden.

### **Priors Wood Court, Takeley**

A number of residents attended the meeting with two TRP members.

As with Alan Hasler House above, noticeboards were checked. Service standards as well as all information for help and assistance and social events were clearly displayed. A residents' committee is active and informs residents of any issues as well as social events and services. Some residents complained that, despite contacting various officers at UDC, they did not always get a reply, although they did not specify what issues they had raised.

Those present who have been resident in 2018 confirmed they had not taken part in the Customer Satisfaction Survey as they felt they had been making their views known for a considerable period of time but to no effect. Some, but not all, reported they were not happy with their tenancy.

All doors have a coded entry but residents said that sometimes people gain entry without this, probably by being let in by a resident. They confirmed that strangers had been found in the common room with no I.D. although it was later established that they were from the Water Company.

Concerns were expressed that the warden has to attend other facilities so is not always contactable and residents were fearful of being left for long periods of time without help in the event they cannot reach the help line.

**FS Feedback:** It is reiterated to all residents that a S.H.O. is contactable at all times during working hours.

**Further feedback:** FS stated that it appeared residents want an SHO on site 24 hours a day. He confirmed that this is not possible and could not be resourced.

One resident who had recently moved in had signed up to the "Bronze" level of care, but TRP members were aware that only one level of care is now available.

Agreed support plans - TRP members explained that these should be kept securely in the office and no-one had received or requested a copy of theirs.

**FS Feedback:** These are kept securely, the issue of residents having copies of the Sheltered Assessment Form was addressed in the 2016 review and the question is asked directly on the form.

Emergency calls and timely response to those - family is usually the first responder.

Independent person for residents - a resident confirmed he had asked a representative from Age UK to sit in with him for meetings with UDC officers.

**Service charges** - there was much concern about these as water is not included in the service charges which it seems to be with other schemes. The residents of the bungalows can use the Court's laundry and shower facilities, which increases water usage for the Court but the bungalows have individual water meters. They complained that they could not get a proper breakdown of the service charges nor were they satisfied with the reason why they have to pay separately for water and different charges seem to apply to different residents. The residents would prefer either separate water meters, or one for the whole building who had contacted the water company could then be shared equally by residents.

**Further feedback:** FS advised that he had contacted the water company regarding the service charges and had escalated the issue to Roz Millership too. Afinity water have refused to supply individual meters. He advised there is an option for residents to take their complaint to the Ombudsman. He advised that the bungalows get charged a percentage of water usage which is used in the community area on the scheme site.

**Parking** - this was a source of much discontent as parking is extremely limited although there are identified ordinary and disabled spaces at the front of the scheme. However, the remainder of the road now has yellow lines, which were being painted just as the TRP members were leaving. The TRP has since learnt that this was done as emergency service vehicles were unable to park and had raised this issue with UDC. Concern was expressed about shopping deliveries as, although there is parking to the rear, there is no buzzer on the door, so residents would not know when a delivery is being made.

**Smoking** - no problems

**Laundry facilities** - the actual machines are fine but residents were not happy as the facility is usually crowded as it is also used by the residents of the bungalows opposite. They are also confused by the facility booklet which states that laundry is free to Priors Wood residents but they say they pay for this in their service charge.

**Window cleaning** - residents reported that this was done twice yearly.

**FS Feedback:** Quarterly.

**Additional remarks** - strong complaints made about the state of the carpets in the communal areas and stairs. They are worn and in places repaired with tape.

**FS Feedback:** Residents were all fully aware when the TRP visited that the carpets to the scheme were being replaced.

**Further feedback:** FS advised the carpets in question had all now been replaced.

Communal kitchen facilities also used by bungalow residents causing tension regarding cleaning, especially of the cooker. Also the cleaner's hours have been cut from three days per week to two.

**FS Feedback:** If the cooker requires cleaning then this is something we can arrange. I have not had any direct input with the cleaner's hours' being cut but the scheme is cleaned sufficiently.

**Further feedback:** FS advised that the cooker had now been cleaned and that he was engaging with the scheme and all other users with regards to the cleanliness of the facilities.

### **Alexia House, Gt Dunmow**

As it had been two weeks since letters were sent out to residents, very few attended the meeting with TRP members.

Similarly to the above schemes, noticeboards had a copy of service standards, along with useful information and details of social activities. There is an active residents' committee and, alongside noticeboards, residents are kept informed at regular coffee mornings/afternoons, Friday lunch outings and fish and chip nights in the common room

It was noted that there was a problem with the front door not always locking closed.

**FS Feedback:** This is correct and was reported to repairs when there is an issue. This was raised with repairs asking for an inspection to have them replaced, this was agreed and we are waiting for the work to commence for new front doors. I will chase this up.

**Further feedback:** FS advised that there had been problems with the doors a this scheme and that the front door needs replacing. He confirmed this is currently being progressed.

There were no issues raised regarding any other questions on the questionnaire and residents spoken to were aware of the agreed support plan.

**Parking** - although no residents raised an issue, it was noted by TRP members that this was extremely limited, although as the scheme is within a housing estate, it would not be easy to overcome this problem.

**Landscaping** - the garden area was attractive and it was noted that work had recently been carried out to make improvements and that work is ongoing, much being either sourced by residents themselves or resourced through the residents' committee funds.

**FS Feedback:** I asked UDC's Grounds Maintenance Team to pay special attention to the rear garden. Most of the improvements made would have been by them or a community payback team that the staff organise.

**Laundry facilities** - the TRP members inspected these and noted that new machines had been installed. Residents did not report any problems with access to the facilities.

No other issues were raised.

**Additional comments** - the warden had arranged for residents to use their Senior Citizen bus passes to pay for a minibus for their outings. Residents were much appreciative of this excellent initiative.

### **The Close, Hatfield Heath**

Again, very few residents met with TRP members, although some were spoken to during a walk around the facility.

Noticeboards were inspected and contained all relevant information about service standards, signposting for emergencies and other issues and social activities.

It was a very hot day and it was noted that one of the outside doors was propped open with no evidence of an intruder alarm. Access could have been gained by an intruder and, due to the heat, some residents also had their front doors either open or ajar.

**FS Feedback:** Due to the layout of the scheme it would not be feasible to have all external doors linked to an intruder alert. We always encourage all residents to make sure doors are not propped open but this is impossible to monitor when staff are not on duty. Many residents choose to have their front doors open or unlocked. Although this is discouraged leaving their doors unlocked is their choice.

**Further feedback:** FS confirmed that although residents are advised not to, his officers cannot control or stop them propping doors open in extreme weather conditions.

No-one spoken to had raised any other issues.

**Parking** - this was plentiful and there did not seem to be any problems.

**Landscaping** - the garden area was well cared for and supplied with seating and shaded areas.

**Laundry facilities** - TRP members inspected these and noted that new machines had been installed and the facilities appeared good.

No other issues were raised regarding service charges, smoking or window cleaning.

**Additional comments** - those residents TRP members spoke to seemed happy with their facilities and did not raise any particular problems. Social activities were well organised and residents could choose to either join in or not.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**Q.1 - Service Standards** - these were all adequately displayed on noticeboards.  
*No recommendation for improvement*

**Q.2 - Kept fully informed** - noticeboards kept up to date with information and events.  
*No recommendation for improvement*

**Q.3 - Safe from abuse** - there were some issues with fire doors being propped open with no alarm and entrance doors not always closing properly which could allow intruders to enter the premises. Issues with workmen not always wearing ID badges and/or signing in.

*Recommend that maintenance checks be carried out on entrance and fire doors and residents be reminded not to leave any access or fire door propped open  
Recommend that carpets be maintained so as not to cause a trip hazard*

*FS Feedback: This is already in place. Entrance doors and trip hazards are checked on the monthly Premises Inspection Forms. Fire doors are checked weekly in line with testing the fire alarms. Residents are reminded not to prop doors open but this can only be policed when an S.H.O. is on duty.*

**Q.4 - Treated fairly** - as this related to repairs it did not form part of this review

**Q.5 - Independence of choice** - results of the 2018 Customer Satisfaction Survey on noticeboards. No particular issues raised by residents.  
*No recommendation for improvement*

**Q.6 - Swift response** - as this related to repairs it did not form part of this review

**Q.7 - Out of hours response** - residents spoken to were aware of their support plan. No particular issues raised by residents.  
*No recommendation for improvement*

**Q.8 - Level of care received** - most residents spoken to were aware there was now only one level of care, although a new resident had signed up to bronze level.  
*Recommend that staff and residents are all aware of the level of care now provided so only one message is given out.*

*FS Feedback: One level of care has been in place since April 1<sup>st</sup> 2017. Everyone automatically receives a daily visit unless they have signed a disclaimer to opt out and receive either a weekly visit or no visit. The resident that you mentioned would have had to sign a disclaimer requesting that they do not want a daily visit.*

**Q.9 - Opportunities** - all the schemes visited ran a range of social activities, including coffee mornings/afternoons, film nights, BBQs, lunches out, fish and chip nights. There were active residents committees in all facilities.  
*No recommendation for improvement*

**Q.10 - Agreed support plan** - residents can have a copy of this if they want but general practice is to retain safely in the scheme office. Officers confirmed the current IT system is not able to provide copies to all residents.  
*No recommendation for improvement*

**Q.11 - Emergency calls** - Carecall send details of all emergency calls to Fergus Simmonds and details are on the noticeboards.  
*Recommend that details could also be included annually in Tenants' Newsletter*

*FS Feedback: Agreed that this is something we could consider. Although I would only consider publishing times for call monitoring and response. It is not relevant as to how many emergencies they have attended to and certainly not where.*

**Q.12 - Timely response to calls** - residents did not raise any particular issues. Details of any calls form part of the monthly Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and are kept under review by officers.  
*No recommendation for improvement*

#### **Additional Questions:**

**Literature published by the Council** - no issues raised by residents.  
*No recommendation for improvement*

**Noticeboards** - all schemes had several in communal areas easily accessed by all residents who are able.  
*No recommendation for improvement*

**Parking** - this was a bone of contention in several of the schemes with parking being very limited as evidenced by the attached photo. It is not easy to see how this could be overcome as some schemes are within housing developments so there is little scope for extending any parking.  
*Recommend that staff investigate how they can prevent non- residents using parking spaces provided either for residents or their visitors.*  
*Recommend that staff carry out a review of all schemes and advise tenants of their rights regarding car parking.*

*FS Feedback: This is on-going at most sites and something that we have considered and improved where possible. Vicarage mead and Priorswood Court have had additional parking put in place and you have rightly noted that at some*

*schemes like Alexia House we do not have the facility to improve or increase parking. Residents are constantly made aware as to their parking rights and what if any action can be taken with regards to non-residents parking. Visitors have the right to park in sheltered bays but where possible we have encouraged them to park elsewhere, at Vicarage Mead we have actively encouraged all staff and able bodied visitors to park in Margaret Street car park and have provided details to residents at Priorswood Court of how to report rogue airport parkers.*

**Further feedback:** *FS advised that ECC have been consulted regarding double yellow lines being installed at some schemes to help with parking issues. He explained that on-going issues were also reliant on residents obeying parking rules. A recent incident whereby emergency service vehicles had restricted access highlighted the case further.*

**Landscaping** - there are no issues raised at any of the schemes visited.  
*No recommendation for improvement*

**Service Charges** - only one scheme raised an issue regarding service charges.  
*Recommend that those residents receive a full breakdown of their service charges and an explanation of why they pay separately for water charges which appear to be included in the service charges for other schemes.*

**FS Feedback:** *This is in progress and discussions are taking place with utility providers and UDC officers. Once a decision has been made residents will be informed.*

**Smoking** - no issues were raised at any of the schemes visited. Smokers either smoked in their own premises or outside.  
*No recommendation for improvement*

**Independent person for tenants** - no residents raised any issue where they felt they required anyone other than a family member to assist them, except the issue raised above.  
*No recommendation for improvement*

**Laundry facilities** - these all seemed adequate with mainly new machines. Only one scheme raised an issue with access as the facilities were also available to occupants of the bungalows opposite.  
*Recommend that officers liaise with those residents and occupants of bungalows to achieve a rota for use.*

**FS Feedback:** *Not required as laundry rooms are rarely busy. When we had this in place in previous years it just caused unnecessary conflict. Notices are placed in laundry rooms requesting residents to remove their laundry straight after use.*

**Further feedback:** *FS confirmed laundry facilities available at Priorswood from 8am – 8pm on a daily basis. He advised whenever he had visited the area was empty or available for use.*

**Window cleaning** - there were no issues raised although some schemes had their

windows cleaned more frequently than others.  
*Recommend that there is a common standard for all schemes.*

**FS Feedback:** *Incorrect. All schemes are cleaned on a quarterly cycle.*

**Additional Comments:**

All residents spoken with at the five schemes highly praised their Warden who, despite their workload, seemed to go the extra mile for their residents.

There is concern that in some schemes social inclusion appears to be difficult perhaps due to frequent changes of tenancies or lack of interest in events planned.

The TRP members were disappointed at the low number of residents they actually spoke with, but took this as a sign that the majority were happy with the service they were receiving and their surroundings.

The TRP would like to take this opportunity of thanking UDC officers and all the residents they spoke with for their co-operation in this review.

Tenant Regulatory Panel

June 2019