

HOUSING BOARD held at ZOOM on TUESDAY, 30 JUNE 2020 at 11.00 am

Present: Councillor P Lees (Chair)
Councillors A Coote, A Dean, A Khan, S Merifield and N Reeve

Officers in attendance: M Baxter (Senior Accountant), C Gibson (Democratic Services Officer), D Malins (Housing Strategy Manager), R Millership (Assistant Director - Housing, Health and Communities) and J Snares (Housing Strategy and Operations Manager)

Also Present: Mrs C Mandy (Chair of Tenant Forum) and S Trimnell (Member of Tenant Forum).

HB1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Armstrong and Lemon.

Declarations of non-pecuniary interest were made by Councillors Merifield and Reeve as members of the Planning Committee.

HB2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2019 were agreed and would be signed by the Chair as an accurate record at the next opportunity.

HB3 HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager gave a verbal update on Homelessness in the District. She said that the Government had announced funding for all authorities to bid for and that the Council was in discussion with other authorities and that the Council was in a better position than most others. She said that landlords cannot currently apply for evictions because of the Covid- 19 pandemic.

In response to various questions from Members, the Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said that 14 people were in temporary accommodation with one property currently empty. She detailed where the properties were located. She said there was 10/11 people in Bed and Breakfast accommodation and these were mainly single men with health issues and that no other meals were provided. She also clarified the position of two people who had previously been identified as rough sleepers. She stated that statistics were kept by her team and agreed to keep members regularly updated through brief overviews.

At this point Simon Trimnell left the meeting as his IT connection failed. He was unable to re-establish the IT link and he sent his apologies.

HB4 **HOUSING STRATEGY**

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager gave a verbal update on the Housing Strategy. She said that the report undertaken by ARK Consultancy was due to be submitted to the Corporate Overview Board on 8 July 2020 and that it was a useful starting point for development of the strategy. She said that the housing needs of the district had previously been delivered through S106 Agreements.

Councillor Dean indicated that he was pleased that the ARK Consultancy report was still under consideration and that the Council should be looking for truly affordable housing, delivering housing costs attuned to people's incomes.

Councillor Khan said that Members should ensure that if the numbers of new homes to be built were included in the strategy these numbers needed to be achievable.

Councillor Coote said that social housing in Uttlesford needed to work and that the correct type of homes to reflect needs should be built.

The Chair said that the Council was very much dependant on current Government policy in respect of Councils being able to build homes and that the Housing team were monitoring Government actions.

HB5 **HRA BUSINESS PLAN**

The Assistant Director – Housing, Health and Communities gave a verbal update on the HRA Business Plan. She said that the current plan ran to the end of December 2020. She said that housing repairs and maintenance services were now being delivered through Norse and that Government announcements were expected, particularly in respect of Right to Buy receipts. Rent debt had initially increased at the start of the Covid- 19 outbreak but had now stabilised. She said that the intention was to include numbers of intended properties within the business plan and that the Senior Accountant was looking at costs on a scheme by scheme basis.

The Chair indicated that the Council's ambitious programme was for 200 new homes. The Assistant Director – Housing, Health and Communities confirmed that the intention was to have this number of homes at a design and feasibility stage but that all was dependent on the ability to borrow.

In response to questions from Members about the new relationship with Norse, the Assistant Director – Housing, Health and Communities said that arrangements had initially been difficult due to the Covid- 19 outbreak but that weekly meetings were now in place with the Director working from the depot and that this had improved the relationship, particularly as a good Service Level Agreement (SLA) was in place. She said that open book accounting arrangements were in place and that the SLA covered the level of overheads. Officers had thoroughly examined the first statement that Norse had submitted

and good monitoring arrangements were in place through the Performance Indicators.

HB6 **DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager and the Housing Strategy Manager provided a summary of the report relating to the proposed development of various sites across the District that had been identified as having potential for the development of council owned homes, as part of the Council's on-going development. They detailed the breakdown of the 200 properties, making up the Development Programme and provided further information in respect of the six sites listed in the report that had been identified as development opportunities on council owned land. They said that sites needed to be identified for a further 70 properties and that they were working with Planning officers to draw up a shortlist of sites. The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager stated that this was all dependent on Government funding arrangements in respect of borrowing rules, RTB income, the borrowing capacity within the HRA and that Homes England grant funding was a possibility for social rents.

The Chair stated that the best way to look at this was that sites for 130 properties had already been identified and the commitment was to provide 200 new homes. Members expressed full support for the works undertaken to date by the Housing Team.

Some Members requested that the statistics also show the net increases in the number of properties as some properties would be demolished to make way for new properties. It was recognised that the properties to be demolished were no longer fit for purpose and would be replaced with houses that people wanted to live in. The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager agreed to include this data in future.

Councillor Coote commented on the well managed housing position in Saffron Walden and asked about how requirements for different clientele were considered when building new homes throughout the District. The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager explained that they looked at what type of property best fitted each location and the specific need for 1 and 2 bedroom properties was recognised.

Councillor Khan asked whether the pledge for 163 social housing properties was achievable. The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager stated that prior to the HRA reforms the Council had been unable to build, the RTB receipts had provided limited funding and that there would need to be discussions with finance professionals and Members about social housing moving forward.

In response to a question from a Member, the Housing Strategy and Operations Manager confirmed that whilst all properties would be for rent this would not prevent RTB from being available in all cases.

The Senior Accountant detailed the on-going financial monitoring arrangements that were in place particularly for HRA income for rents.

The Chair of Tenant Forum expressed support for all the initiatives currently being explored.

Councillor Dean said he was encouraged by the Board's determination to move forward and suggested further discussions when the ARK Consultancy report became available. The Chair stated that the ARK Consultancy report would be taken at Local Plan level rather than HRA level and would move to the Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Group.

RESOLVED: That the Housing Board recommends to Cabinet that these identified sites are progressed through the planning application stage, and subject to borrowing capacity within the Housing revenue Account, put into construction.

HB7 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager stated:

- RTB spending extensions would be in place until the year end and it was possible that this timescale would be extended further.
- There had been a review of the tenants' engagement process to encourage more engagement. This would result in one new overarching panel and it would be launched through New Housing News in the autumn.

Meeting Closed 12:55 pm