

**HOUSING BOARD held at COMMITTEE ROOM - COUNCIL OFFICES,
LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, ESSEX CB11 4ER, on MONDAY, 29
APRIL 2024 at 12.30 pm**

Present: Councillor A Coote (Chair)
Councillors S Barker, C Fiddy, R Freeman, P Lees (Vice-Chair)
and M Tayler

Officers in attendance: S Russell (Interim Strategic Director of Housing Health and Communities), B Burton (Interim Director of Property), R Flowers (Housing Management Team Leader), C Gibson (Democratic Services Officer), N Shephard-Lewis (Tenant Engagement Officer) and J Snares (Housing Strategy and Operations Manager)

Also present: J Cotier (Chair of Tenant and Leaseholder Panel) and S Ovel (Vice-Chair of Tenant and Leaseholder Panel).

HB21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Driscoll and for lateness from Councillor Lees.

As this was to be her last meeting before retirement, the Chair thanked Judith Snares for all her service to the Council over the years.

There were no declarations of interest.

HB22 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2024 were approved as an accurate record.

**HB23 PROCUREMENT OF REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE SERVICES -
PREFERRED OPERATING MODEL AND GENERAL UPDATE**

The Interim Director of Property presented his report.

He provided an overview of the Cabinet's decision on 18 April 2024 to adopt the mixed economy model (Option 11) as the future operating model for repairs, maintenance and capital works across the Council's housing stock. He said that the Council would be looking to get value for money (VFM) in both quality and delivery and summarised the process moving forward. He said that finances on repairs would be on an average order value basis.

In response to a question, he confirmed that PPN 01/24 Carbon Reduction Contract Schedule would be utilised within the procurement process and that de-carbonisation considerations would also be included.

The Interim Strategic Director of Housing, Health and Communities outlined the reasons for not being able to bring the service back in-house and the benefits that would be brought in by using an outside specialist contractor. She also said that in respect of VFM, the Council would not necessarily be looking for the cheapest option.

The Chair supported the logic behind utilising the services of an outside contractor rather than bringing the service back in-house.

The Board favourably noted and considered the analysis underpinning Cabinet's approval of the mixed economy model and supported the statutory consultation approach with tenants and leaseholders regarding the approved service delivery model changes.

Councillor Lees joined the meeting at 12.45.

HB24

HOUSING OMBUDSMAN NEW STATUTORY COMPLAINTS HANDLING CODE SELF-ASSESSMENT

The Interim Strategic Director of Housing, Health and Communities summarised her report and introduced Rebecca Flowers, Housing Management Team Leader and Nicole Shephard-Lewis, Tenant Engagement Officer, and explained their roles and responsibilities and that they would be part of the Task and Finish Group to drive forward the complaints management improvement actions. She said that the Council was currently not compliant with the Code in certain areas and that its self-assessment of compliance against the Code had to be submitted to the Ombudsman by 30 June 2024.

In response to various questions officers:

- Said that they would address the issue of embedded documents being able to be opened.
- Outlined the expectation that all staff would be able to assist the public in addressing their complaints and the training that would be forthcoming.
- Said that Members should continue to use their in-boxes to forward any complaints through to Housing officers.
- Said that complaints were currently reviewed on a weekly basis.
- Said that complaints patterns would be looked at and that most complaints were about repair works not being carried out in a timely manner and that better communication with tenants was required.
- Said that there was a statutory requirement to produce an Annual Report on complaints and that, moving forwards, a monthly performance dashboard would be created for complaints.

The Board supported the draft self-assessment moving forward.

HB25

UPDATE ON RECENT COMPLAINTS HANDLING DETERMINATION BY THE HOUSING OMBUDSMAN

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager provided Members with a verbal update on a recent determination.

She said that a complaint had been made to the Ombudsman by a tenant in respect of how the Council had handled repairs to their property (including damp and mould), tenant alterations, neighbour's issues, conduct of staff members and overcrowding issues. The Ombudsman had found severe maladministration by the landlord in respect of how the repairs to the property had been handled and noted poor record-keeping of the repairs. Service failures had been identified on three of the other four issues but that there was no maladministration. The matter of overcrowding had been dealt with appropriately. The Ombudsman had ordered the Council to apologise to the tenant and pay compensation of £1,300, £1000 for the severe maladministration of the repair's issues and £100 for each service failure. The Ombudsman has since been notified that the Council has fully complied with its order, and the Ombudsman has confirmed that the case was now closed.

In response to a question, officers outlined the authority of the Housing Ombudsman.

The meeting finished at 1.20 pm.