

Committee: Council
Title: Report of the Portfolio Holder for Housing
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Julie Redfern
Portfolio Holder for Housing

Date:
Tuesday 9th April
2019

Summary

1. This report summarises the key activities for the year 2018/19 in the Housing portfolio.

Recommendations

2. None

Financial Implications

3. None

Background Papers

4. None

Impact

- 5.

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

Situation

Housing Strategy and Enabling

6. Work continues on reviewing the Housing Strategy and Housing Allocations Policy in the light of the proposed Garden Communities in the district. Several members of the Housing Team have been and continue to be actively involved in this work to ensure that policy decisions will address the defined housing need in the new Garden Communities.
7. Delivering good quality affordable homes for local people is a council priority. This year in addition to the council's own development programme that delivered 43 properties a further 309 new build affordable properties have been completed by registered providers. This includes 208 affordable rented properties and 101 shared ownership. This is well above the council's annual target of 100 properties.
8. The council has been working with registered provider L&Q and Essex County Council (ECC) for the successful delivery of district's first Independent Living Scheme, Cornell Court, in Saffron Walden. The scheme will provide 71 units of accommodation and is due for completion in May 2019 with residents beginning to move in by the end of July 2019. All of these apartments will be for rent and allocated in partnership with ECC. This is an exciting addition to the variety of housing available to residents in Uttlesford and is for those who need extra assistance to stay living independently for as long as possible.
9. L&Q, UDC and ECC working together has also resulted in the successful delivery of new learning disabilities scheme in Saffron Walden. The scheme completed in November 2018. Residents have been identified and will be moving in once the scheme has been fully staffed. In addition 2 council owned houses have been converted into shared houses for people with learning difficulties. The properties have been leased to a specialist housing association, who will be providing support, and new tenants have moved in.
10. A series of Community Led Housing workshops was held at the council offices. The workshops are designed to inform residents, parish councils and community groups on how to take ideas forward to planning permission. The council has also put in place a grant scheme to help local groups begin the process of delivering community led housing.

Private Sector Housing

11. Following a national review of Disabled Facility Grants (DFG), the service is working with Partners at Essex County Council to broaden the scope of DFG to include home adaptations and preventative care. This reflects the wider benefits of the grant for improving independence and safer living. As part of the review UDC is part funding on a 12 month trial basis with West Essex partners (Harlow and Epping) an Occupational Therapist (OT) in Housing. The OT will work with officers and hospital/ hospice teams to assist in the timely discharge of patients to home and therefore avoid unnecessary bed blocking and/or residential placements.
12. In October changes to the mandatory licensing definition for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) came into force. A HMO is now defined as a property that is occupied by 5 or more persons from 2 or more households. New licence fees to reflect this work have been adopted and to date the service has

licensed 13 properties. Further work to identify unlicensed HMOs will occur in 2019/20.

13. In November Cabinet approved the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy. The policy introduced the ability for officers to issue civil penalties of up to £30,000 for Housing Act offences. These penalties are an alternative to prosecution and are considered a welcome addition to existing powers to tackle poor landlords

Housing Options and Homelessness

14. The new Homelessness Reduction Act was implemented in April 2018 and the Homelessness Strategy and Allocations Policy have been reviewed and updated to take account of the new duties required under the Act. Partnership meetings are held quarterly to enable cross organisational homelessness prevention work to be carried out.
15. 712 approaches have been made to the Council's Housing Options drop-in advice surgery since April 2018 with people being given, where appropriate, personalised housing plans to help them keep or secure accommodation. Of these 172 made homeless applications and a total of 15 cases were accepted as being owed the full homelessness duty.
16. In addition the Housing Options Team has allocated 520 properties for rent this year. Over 200 of these allocations were to new build properties and the rest to vacancies within the council's own stock and existing housing association stock.

Council Housing Development Programme

17. The council continues to ensure that right to buy receipts are spent, in accordance with the agreement with the government, on the council's own development programme and are not returned to government.
18. The council's own housing development programme has now delivered a total of 114 properties to date. Not only is this a much needed addition to the stock of local needs housing, it is also important to note the wider economic stimulus construction sites like this generate locally.
19. This year the council completed the development of 3 properties on two garage sites in Sheds Lane Saffron Walden which included a wheelchair compliant property for a local family.
20. The redevelopment of Reynolds Court was delivered on time and on budget with Phase II consisting of 26 flats opened in September 2018. This major redevelopment project, which attracted Homes England grant funding, has totally transformed Reynolds Court, creating a total of 41 smart, modern homes for residents as well as an excellent range of communal facilities.
21. The re-modelling of Hatherley Court in Saffron Walden commenced in May 2017 and is taking shape. The scheme is being modernised to a high standard and when complete will provide 26 spacious flats suitable for modern living. There will also be two new one-bed flats added to the scheme, a new ground floor day room with a conservatory overlooking the Common, and a new

entrance area. The first phase of works comprising of 14 flats completed in February this year and tenants recently moved into their new spacious accommodation. The second phase is under way and due to be completed by December 2019

22. Building work is progressing on 4 new build properties and provision of new parking court for adjacent Council owned flats at Newton Grove in Great Dunmow. The properties are due for completion in May 2019.
23. Building work is also progressing on 4 properties and associated parking at Frambury Lane in Newport. The properties are also due for completion in May 2019.

Future Council Housing Development Projects

24. The Government's announcement in the Autumn to lift the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) borrowing cap has given the council the opportunity to increase its own housing development programme. The HRA will be looking to borrow up to 70% of the development costs to put with the 30% RTB receipts that can be kept under existing RTB rules.
25. Following the lifting of the borrowing cap it has been agreed that the Council will now take full control of the re-development of Walden Place in Saffron Walden. The proposal is to re-provide the communal areas and further sheltered accommodation, enabling separation of the sheltered accommodation and its communal facilities from the Grade 2 listed building and its disposal as a restoration project. Planning drawings are being progressed, along with associated surveys and reports. There is continuing consultation with residents.
26. A planning application for 16 properties at The Moors in Little Dunmow has also been submitted and will be going to Planning Committee in April 2019.
27. Proposals are being drawn up for affordable housing schemes on two further development sites in the District, to be funded through the HRA, and will be considered by Cabinet in June 2019.
28. This year a total of 11 properties were sold under the Right to Buy. This rate of sale is in line with the HRA business plan and the retained receipts along with the added flexibility of the removal of the borrowing cap, will enable the council to continue to deliver an ambitious housing development programme.

Resident Involvement

29. A number of successful series of community 'trailer days' were held over the summer months. Sessions were held at various locations throughout the district with more agency partners attending this year attracting larger numbers of people wanting help or advice. The trailer days have been invaluable in helping to understand what are the priorities and concerns for the council's tenants.

30. The Tenant Forum and Tenant Regulatory Panel (TRP) continue to be involved in these events and have worked hard to improve services for all tenants across the district. This year the TRP focussed on improving the reporting of repairs and their recommendations will enable the council to complete more jobs 'right first time'.
31. Finally I want to say a big thank you to all those tenants who have got involved and helped us improve our service over the past year. Their views and ideas are invaluable to us and have helped to shape the services delivered to all tenants in the district.