

**HOUSING BOARD held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES,  
LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY, 21  
NOVEMBER 2019 at 11.00 am**

Present: Councillor P Lees (Chair)  
Councillors A Coote, A Dean, A Gerard, M Lemon, S Merifield  
and N Reeve  
Officers in attendance: 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)  
Mrs J Cousins (Member of Tenant Forum)

**1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies of absence were received from Cllrs Khan and Armstrong

Declarations of interest were made by Cllrs Merifield, Lemon, Gerrard and  
Reeve as members of the Planning Committee and Cllr Lemon as a private  
landlord

**2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 14 March 2019 were approved and  
signed by the Chairman as a correct record of the meeting

**3 HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY**

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager gave a brief explanation for the  
requirements for a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and then  
explained that after this meeting the draft document would go out to public  
consultation any amendments would then be made before the document went  
before Cabinet for formal adoption in January 2020.

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager suggested that members may  
like to email her with any comments or queries that they have regarding the  
document.

Cllr Dean asked some questions regarding the strategy and for clarification  
regarding some of the figures and charts within it. Cllr Reeve asked if the officer  
was confident that the strategy could be delivered, she said that there were  
always unknowns but yes as things stood she was.

Members felt that this was a good document and were happy for it to be  
consulted on and then put to cabinet with any amendments.

#### 4 **RENT AND SERVICE CHARGE SETTING**

The Assistant Director Housing Health and Communities talked to the contents of the report that explained the approach being taken to increasing rents for the council's housing and garage tenants in the coming financial year.

Cllr Reeve asked why CPI was used for rents but RPI for other charges. The Assistant Director explained that the Government used CPI for its rents policy but that the council had historically always used RPI for its other charges so this is why service charges were increased by RPI.

It was explained that Lifeline charges are to be kept at the same level again this year as Essex County Council are currently reviewing telecare services across Essex and are looking at procuring an Essex wide service rather than funding individual councils such as Uttlesford to provide the service to their referees.

Cllr Gerrard asked was the Governments rent policy likely to change with a change in Government. Officers felt it would be very unlikely to change for the next year at least.

**APPROVED** to endorse the contents of the report and rents and service charges to be increased accordingly

#### 5 **TENANT REGULATORY PANEL (TRP) UPDATE**

In the absence of the Chair of the Regulatory Panel the Housing Strategy and Operations Manager briefed members on the contents of the report in front of them that the panel had completed on sheltered housing. She also explained that the panel would now be looking at the council's downsizing policy that tried to encourage tenants in larger properties to move to smaller ones.

It was also explained by officers that once the current STARR survey of all our tenants was completed there would be a review of how the council engaged with its tenants and the roles of the Tenants Forum and Regulatory Panel.

#### 6 **DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager gave a verbal update on the council's current development programme

Hatherley Court – Phase 2 was progressing well after delays caused by having to move pipes and cables and is now expected to be completed in February 2020.

Frambury Lane and Newton Grove – the four properties on each of these sites were now nearing completion with Frambury Lane due to be ready for letting in December and Newton Grove just into the New Year. It was suggested that members might like to view these properties before they were occupied.

Walden Place – The plans for a pre planning application for this scheme are being finalised. The plan is to detach the main house from the rest of the sheltered scheme and then sell the listed house for private development, whilst new communal facilities and replacement flats would be added to the remaining part of the scheme.

The Moors – We are now in contract for building 16 new council properties on this site, half of which will be at social rent thanks to the HOMES England grant funding we have received. Planning conditions are being discharged and it is hoped building works will commence properly in January with the scheme completing in early 2020.

Great Chesterford site – we are currently waiting a planning committee date for the revised scheme for this site. Although the site has planning permission, which was gained by Hastoe Housing Association before the council bought this site, the current permission is for 11 larger market style properties and we are seeking to change this to 13 properties appropriate for letting at affordable rents. We have started to discharge some of the planning conditions associated with the original application as they will be the same under any new permission granted. If we do not get a new planning permission then we would have to build out the current permission.

Thaxted Road Saffron Walden – planning permission has now been granted on this site and detailed plans are now being drawn up prior to going out to tender for a contractor.

We are also at the various stages of the development process for sites in Saffron Walden, White Roding and Elsenham.

Cllr Dean asked a question regarding the standard of housing being developed by the council in terms of energy efficiency. Officers explained that we had a build standard that was set by members in the past and that was set to meet building regulation standards. We didn't currently develop Passiv houses because of the additional costs involved which would result in us delivering fewer houses. The Asst Director said that if members wanted officers to look again at these standards then officers could look at comparative costs of both building costs and what this would mean in terms of savings to tenants on their heating costs.

Cllr Reeve asked a question regarding the thermal efficiency of current council stock. The Asst Director explained that we had a programme for external insulation on our single brick homes that was currently about half way complete. There were still over 200 properties to go and the budget was currently set to complete 10 properties a year due to the expensive nature of this type of work. She confirmed that currently there were no government grants available.

The Assistant Director: Housing Health and Communities then presented a report regarding the future of two of the council's sheltered schemes. Alexia Houser in Dunmow and Parkside in Saffron Walden. It was explained that both these schemes no longer provided accommodation of the standard that would meet 21<sup>st</sup> Century living and therefore it was proposed to look at full re-

development on both these sites. Parkside would continue to be older person's accommodation but not a sheltered scheme and the Alexia House site would be considered for general needs housing.

Officers were looking at this stage for an in principle agreement from members so that officers could start talking to tenants about the future of these sites and to stop the allocation of any future vacancies.

Members were keen to see this work progressed especially that a scheme in Dunmow was being considered as there was a perception that everything happened in the north of the district.

**APPROVED** Officers to move to the next stage of undertaking feasibility studies on these two sites, informing tenants of the council's plans and not re-letting future vacancies within these two schemes.

## 7 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

RESOLVED to exclude the public and press for the following items on the grounds that they contained exempt information within the meaning of s.1 etc

## 8 **HOUSING REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE PROPOSALS**

The Assistant Director: Housing Health and Communities presented details of a proposal to set up a joint venture with Norse (a company originally set up by Norfolk County Council that still has links to the council). This would see the creation of a new company, Uttlesford Norse, which would deliver the repairs and maintenance services that are currently provided by the council's team at Newport depot along with its outside contractors.

Members then discussed the proposal which was due to be considered by Cabinet on 26 November.

It was explained that all employees in the services affected would transfer to the joint venture company with Norse with no change to their existing terms and conditions of employment. A consultation process in relation to the transfer of employees would commence should the arrangement be approved by Cabinet.

**APPROVED** that members of the housing board were fully supportive of the proposal for a joint venture with Norse to deliver the repairs and maintenance services.

Meeting closed at 12.50.