

**HOUSING BOARD held at ZOOM on TUESDAY, 2 NOVEMBER 2021
at 2.00 pm**

Present: Councillor P Lees (Chair)
Councillors A Dean, G Driscoll, A Khan, M Lemon, S Merifield
and N Reeve

Officers in attendance: C Edwards (Democratic Services Officer), P Lock (Housing Enabling and Development Officer), D Malins (Development Manager), R Millership (Assistant Director - Housing, Health and Communities) and J Snares (Housing Strategy and Operations Manager)

Also present: C Mandy (Chair of Tenant and Leaseholder Panel) and S Ovel (Member of Tenant and Leaseholder Panel).

HB1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Coote and Foley.

HB2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 10th December 2020 were approved.

It was agreed that meetings would be held more frequently going forward

HB3 HOUSING STRATEGY

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager presented the report and highlighted the following: -

- There had been a 6 week public consultation, as well as the report being shared with Essex County Council; stakeholders; internal colleagues and the Local Plan team.
- There had been feedback and the document had been amended appropriately and all responses had been acknowledged.
- She thanked the Housing Enabling and Development Officer for all his work on the document.
- It was an interim document until the Local Plan was in place.
- There was an action plan which would be monitored by the Housing Board.

The recommendation was for this document to go forward to Cabinet and for it to be adopted by the end of the year.

In response to a query from Councillor Khan, the Housing Enabling and Development Officer said that a section at the end of the document would be added to capture and incorporate details of the feedback and responses given.

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said the report had been changed in places because of the feedback but agreed, in order to make it clearer, to circulate a revised document which would include the responses.

Councillor Khan said that more council homes were desperately needed and there had been a commitment from the administration to build more homes.

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said that the report set out a clear strategy of what was needed within the district and an action plan to increase the number of council homes, but this involved investment and it was up to Members to decide how they would fund the extra homes.

The Housing Strategy Manager said that there had been new council homes built but there was no more council owned land apart from the odd single plot. The Local Plan made it more difficult due to the current 'call for sites' which Landowners and Developers were focused on and were therefore less likely to engage with negotiations with the Council to invest in council houses.

Other Members agreed that more social housing was needed.

Councillor Lemon said there was a need for more bungalows to be built but he said there was a misalignment between Planning and Housing who needed to work together and communicate so that Planning was not allowing owners of bungalows to demolish and rebuild or extend upwards.

The Chair said that once the strategy was adopted the next step would be to try and implement the action plan which would include funding for social housing. It would be looked at as an administration and this would be within the Investment Board's remit.

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said that the strategy provided the framework to move things forward and this would include discussion at future Housing Board meetings.

Councillor Merifield said that there was a requirement for developers to provide 40% affordable housing within each development. This would feed into the Local Plan and she said it would be up to the Council what percentage of affordable housing would be required going forward. It could be increased.

In response to a question from Councillor Reeve the Housing Enabling and Development Officer said that the 5% target to build bungalows could not be enforced until it was part of the Local Plan, but discussions did take place with developers. An action point from the report was to investigate through the census data the local requirements for bungalows. He agreed that this would be followed up with the Local Plan team.

The Housing Enabling and Development Officer said that the change in definition of the gypsy and traveller sites had been considered and Essex County Council (ECC) had provided the data in the report. He said he was also liaising with the Local Plan team.

Councillor Khan said that Uttlesford District Council (UDC) needed to be clear on the correct numbers for the gypsy and traveller sites and asked that this was fed into the Local Plan team. The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said this data had been provided to the Local Plan team and they had received no indication that there were any problems.

Councillor Reeve said that UDC had a high level of fuel poverty, the Housing Enabling and Development Officer said that the Environmental Health department had fed into the document and the action and wording was taken from their information and knowledge of the district. There was funding available for residents with low incomes.

Councillor Dean asked about community led housing and whether the action plan addressed this.

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said it was a fairly new concept, and that there were grants set up to support groups to get started. She said that a Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) Enabling Officer and the Housing Enabling and Development Officer from UDC were available for help. There had been funding for the Eastern Homes hub which provided information and support. She said there had been interest from some parishes.

The Chair recommended that the document was taken onto Cabinet with the feedback responses added to the report and the policy about gypsy and traveller sites clarified with the Local Plan team. There was also a commitment given from Housing and Planning, via Councillor Merifield, to work together and have a joint understanding on bungalows.

RESOLVED: That the Housing Board recommend the report to Cabinet with the following changes: -

- Feedback responses added
- Gypsy and traveller sites clarified with the Local Plan team.

Councillor Driscoll left the meeting at 3:30pm

HB4 DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager provided a summary of the report that detailed the progress on the development programme. She outlined the current positions in respect of developments at:

- The Moors, Little Dunmow – ready to handover in the next 6 weeks.
- Thaxted Road, Saffron Walden – ready to handover summer 2022.
- Bartholomew Close, Great Chesterford – ready to handover summer 2022.
- Parkside, Saffron Walden – planning application would be submitted in the new year.
- Gold Close, Elsenham – built for a specific family and they should be moved in before Christmas.

- Auton Croft, Saffron Walden – the planning application had gone to Planning Committee with a recommendation to approve from the Officers but had been deferred for a site visit. The Housing Board needed to decide whether to go ahead or withdraw the application. There were several objections from residents.
- St Martin's Close, White Roding – heritage said they could not support the application on the site and therefore it would not go ahead.
- Alexia House, Great Dunmow – due to be changed to apartments for over 60's an architect was drawing up plans. The planning application would go forward in the new year.
- Walden Place – planning permission granted.
- Takeley Day Centre Garage Site – in consultation with an architect to draw up plans, early stages.
- Garden reduction sites – some of UDC properties had big gardens and when they were relet half of the garden was being kept back for possible development in the future. Currently 3 sites have outline planning applications and 2 further sites had been identified.

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said there were no further development sites identified, but there were some possible S106 opportunities. She said there had been discussion with Barrett's to buy 18, 1 bedroom apartments on a site in Great Dunmow, they had accepted UDC's offer but it had not been approved by the Barrett board yet.

Councillor Khan said that the Auton Croft planning application should continue forward, members of the planning committee were not able to comment but there was general consensus to go ahead.

The Housing Strategy Manager said it met all the policy requirements and the objections received had focused around the fact that it was on a green field site.

Members said the garden reduction site should be developed by UDC rather than sold.

RESOLVED: To continue with the Auton Croft planning application and for UDC to keep hold of the garden reduction sites for future development.

The Development Manager left the meeting at 4pm.

HB5

AFFORDABLE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTIONS

The Housing Enabling and Development Officer presented the report which set out the projected affordable completions for this financial year. He said that this year was low due to the pandemic, but there were several sites due for completion including Woodlands Park, Dunmow, the Barrett site and Land West of Woodside Way which would boost the figures but was out of the Council's direct control. He said that the figures should pick up from this year onwards.

Councillor Reeve asked for a list of approved properties to get a clear picture of what had been through the Planning Committee as he was surprised the figures were so low.

Councillor Lemon asked about Cox Ley in Hatfield Heath, the Housing Enabling and Development Officer said there had been a hold up with the S106 application.

HB6 **HOMELESSNESS UPDATE**

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager gave a verbal update. She said the Housing Options team had been busy, and there were 55 open cases. The length of time that people were in temporary accommodation had increased and this was an issue going forward. The longest wait had been almost a year.

There had been 85 cases of homelessness so far this year, but this did not reflect the people that the team had managed to prevent becoming homeless and had rehoused.

UDC were part of a consortium led by Essex County Council who had received government Rough Sleeping initiative funding this gave UDC access to a homelessness outreach service run by an organisation called Chess. If there were reports of people sleeping on the streets a representative came out and tried to find them and help them get into accommodation.

Two new members of staff had been recruited to the Housing Options team.

The first Afghan family were due to move into the district shortly and one other property would be made available for the Afghan Resettlement Programme.

Evictions were starting again, and this was likely to increase homelessness.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said that one of the Performance Indicators that went to Members every quarter was how many people had been prevented from becoming homeless.

In response to a question from Councillor Khan, the Housing Strategy and Operations Manager confirmed that there were no homeless people being funded to live outside the district.

HB7 **HOUSING BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE AND RENT SETTING REPORT**

The Assistant Director - Housing and Environmental Services said that the final business plan would come to the next Housing Board meeting, as it was not yet a finished document. She said she was waiting for further government guidance on funding through the HRA. All the current development opportunities were mostly funded as they were already in the budget, she said it was borrowing going forward that needed to be looked at.

She said that the rent setting report had recommended an uplift in rent as this was necessary in order to have a sustainable business plan. The rise would be 4.9% which was Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus 1%, the tenant forum had approved this at their last meeting. Garage rent and Lifeline services were also being raised by 4.9% in line with the Retail Price Index (RPI). Intensive housing management charges, housing related support, heating service and sewage charges would be increased in line with actual costs. Removal of garden waste costs would also be raised slightly.

Councillor Khan said that he could not sign up to the rent increase because of the current difficult economic situation which included the reduction in payment to those on Universal Credit. The Assistant Director - Housing and Environmental Services said that people on Universal Credit would have their housing element increased to cover the rise, but it was those people on low incomes who may suffer but there had not been a rent increase for 4 years.

In response to a question from Councillor Khan, the Assistant Director - Housing and Environmental Services said she would come back with figures regarding the total cost of the rent increase to UDC.

Carole Mandy from the tenant's forum said the meeting had reluctantly agreed to the rise in rents. Susan Ovel said that other costs were going up as well, but she felt that UDC did a good job and understood why the increase needed to happen.

The Chair recommended that the report was approved and that the next step would be that it was presented to the Scrutiny Committee. Members agreed to approve the document to be taken onto Scrutiny with the financial information added to the document before the meeting.

RESOLVED: Members agreed to approve the document to be taken onto Scrutiny with the additional financial information added to the document.

HB8

UTTLESFORD NORSE PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

The Assistant Director - Housing and Environmental Services said that Internal Audit had concerns about the partnership. There had been a contract meeting and Norse had acknowledged the issues, however some decisions needed to be made about how to go forward and make the partnership work better for UDC.

Councillor Dean was disappointed about the problems within the Partnership and would have liked a written report.

The Assistant Director - Housing and Environmental Services said that the audit report was not available yet, but she would share as soon as possible. She said she just wanted to make the Housing Board aware of the issue.

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said that Norse had staff shortages and problems recruiting and therefore had not resourced the contract as well as they should have done. There was not an obvious alternative, so the partnership needed to be worked on to try and get the best from the service.

The Chair said there had been regular operational meetings and she recognised that there had been problems and the pandemic had affected services up to a point, but serious decisions now needed to be made.

Councillor Lemon suggested that this was put on the agenda for the next meeting.

Councillor Khan left the meeting at 4:50pm

HB9

LIFELINE UPDATE

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said that unfortunately UDC could not continue to maintain the Lifeline service. The technology was moving fast, and the equipment was becoming more expensive as it changed from analogue to digital. ECC had also stopped funding the equipment which meant there was no 12 week free period and no free equipment. The service had managed to fund equipment for this year but it was not going to be viable to run the service in the long term. NHS Provide, who already provided the monitoring and response service for Uttlesford Lifeline and ran a similar service across many districts of Essex, had agreed to take over the full running of the Uttlesford service going forward and this switch would be made from April next year. When details have been finalised with NHS Provide she said that all UDC customers would be contacted to let them know and give them all the necessary information about the change.

The meeting finished at 5.00pm.