

HOUSING BOARD held at ZOOM on TUESDAY, 15 MARCH 2022 at 11.00 am

Present: Councillor
Councillors A Dean, A Khan, M Lemon, S Merifield and N Reeve

Officers in attendance: C Cardross Grant (Graduate Environmental Health Officer), A Lindsell (Democratic Services Officer), P Lock (Housing Enabling and Development Officer), R Millership (Assistant Director - Housing, Health and Communities), J Snares (Housing Strategy and Operations Manager) and M Watts (Environmental Health Manager - Protection)

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

HB10 ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR THIS MEETING

Due to the absence of Councillor Lees the Democratic Services Officer requested nominations for the position of Chair.

Councillor Lemon nominated Councillor Merifield to be Chair.
This was seconded by Councillor Reeve.

RESOLVED that Councillor Merifield be elected Chair.

HB11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lees and Coote.

Councillor Dean gave apologies for partial attendance of the meeting.

There were no declarations of interest.

HB12 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2021 were approved.

Councillor Dean noted his displeasure that the Uttlesford Norse partnership update on this agenda was another verbal report following his complaint about it being a verbal update at the November Housing Board meeting.

HB13 EMPTY HOMES POLICY

The Environmental Health Manager – Protection presented the Empty Homes Policy.

He confirmed that the Council recognised that there are different reasons why properties remain empty and likewise there needs to be a range of options available to owners of empty homes to bring them back into use. The Council would initially work informally with owners, however formal enforcement options were available when this approach fails.

The Environmental Health Manager went on to recommend approval of the policy.

Councillor Dean mentioned a long term unresolved case in Stansted and requested that the report demonstrate past success rates to clarify effectiveness.

The Environmental Health Manager explained that 99% of action they take is informal and residents take action. There are some hardcore complex cases that are difficult, laborious and expensive to resolve. Very rarely a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) is necessary, usually only once every two years. Funding also limits the number of CPOs we can take on at any particular time. He agreed to provide statistics and further details to Members.

In response to questions from Councillor Khan the Environmental Health Officer confirmed that 798 properties have been brought back into occupation between April 2016 and March 2021 and agreed to circulate updated figures as they become available.

Councillor Khan asked where the current 235 empty homes were located in the district, what sort of properties they were and the estimated cost to make them habitable.

The Graduate Environmental Health Officer confirmed that the properties are spread around the district with more located in urban areas than in rural. He explained the difficulty in estimating the cost to bring the properties back into occupation as some might require minor paint work while others may not have been updated for thirty years. He noted that 85% of properties are turned around relatively quickly, 10% on a longer interactive pathway initially involving the despatch of standard letters and the final 5% requiring significant action, including enforcement action.

Following discussion Members and Officers agreed that the inclusion of the number of empty properties per ward, highlighted as a snapshot, would satisfy the request.

Councillor Reeve asked whether the number of empty properties was increasing or decreasing in recent years.

The Graduate Environmental Health Officer confirmed that the number of empty properties tends to oscillate between 215 and 245. He noted that most resolve themselves with less than 1% of the 40,000 properties in the district requiring assistance.

He confirmed that they do not engage with their own housing stock, care homes, Police, NHS, annexes or public houses and that this process strips out approximately a third of cases.

RESOLVED: That the Housing Board recommend the report to Cabinet for approval subject to the following amendments:

- Inclusion of delivery record performance indicators for previous years.
- Inclusion of the number of empty properties per ward, highlighted as a current snapshot.

The Graduate Environmental Health Officer left the meeting.

HB14 **SECTION 106 CONTRIBUTIONS**

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager provided a summary of the proposed use of the Section 106 committed sums with the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) development programme.

She confirmed that the Council currently had Section 106 contributions of approximately £946K which is for use on the delivery of affordable housing within the district.

It was proposed to utilise these contributions, when appropriate, within the council's Housing Development Programme.

The S106 contributions would allow the HRA to reduce the HRA funding element on future developments. Reducing HRA borrowing requirements would release money that could be used to invest in the council's current stock.

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager recommended approval of the in principle decision that Section 106 contributions were utilised by the HRA development programme.

Councillor Khan asked whether the S106 contributions would be ringfenced to build council homes only with social rents rather than social and affordable rents.

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager confirmed that they would be Council owned properties and that developments could be assessed individually as to grant funding availability to achieve social rents, but that where grant funding was not available affordable rent would be necessary to make a scheme financially viable.

Councillor Khan noted that residents needed a secure tenancy and Members needed to do everything possible to secure council homes for the people in need across Uttlesford.

The Assistant Director of Housing and Environmental Services noted that Officers are highly successful at accessing grants to enable housing to be delivered at social rents.

The Chair asked whether implementing only social housing would result in fewer houses being built and the Assistant Director of Housing and Environmental

Services confirmed that including affordable rent allows the Council to build more housing. She added that all Council rents whether social or affordable were under the housing allowance.

Councillor Dean said that he believed that South Cambridgeshire were delivering 100 council owned homes a year and suggested that the Council should compare their delivery of Council houses with adjacent authorities to discover whether we should be more ambitious.

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager resolved to raise individual projects as they arise to identify where social grants can be achieved in that scenario for Members to consider.

Councillor Lemon proposed that the Housing Board recommend the in principle decision that Section 106 contributions were utilised by the HRA development programme to Cabinet for approval. This was seconded by Councillor Reeve.

RESOLVED: That the Housing Board recommend the in principle decision that Section 106 contributions were utilised by the HRA development programme to Cabinet for approval.

HB15 HRA BUSINESS PLAN - VERBAL UPDATE

The Assistant Director for Housing and Environmental Services provided a verbal update on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan. She resolved to release the plan for review within two weeks, alongside the last action plan and welcomed comments from Members to achieve new actions for the next five years.

The update was noted.

HB16 DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager provided an update on the proposed development by the HRA across the District. She outlined the current positions in respect of Council owned developments at:

- The Moors, Little Dunmow – final handover completed January 2022 of 8 affordable rented 2 bed houses and 8 social rented 1 bed flats. All dwellings are fully let.
- Thaxted Road, Saffron Walden – handover anticipated September 2022 of 14 homes.
- Bartholomew Close, Great Chesterford – handover anticipated July 2022 of 13 homes.
- Parkside, Saffron Walden – planning application submission anticipated April 2022. The current scheme offers 24 flats for the over 60s.
- Gold Close, Elsenham – project complete, family moved into their 3 bedroom fully wheelchair compliant bungalow in December 2021.

- Auton Croft, Saffron Walden – this application for 14 dwellings, consisting of 1, 2 and 3 bedroom houses, and a 2 bedroom wheelchair compliant bungalow will be determined at the April 2022 Planning Committee.
- Alexia House, Great Dunmow – planning application submission anticipated May 2022. The scheme is for 24 apartments, a mixture of 1 and 2 bed including some fully wheelchair accessible units and is for the over 60s.
- Walden Place – planning approval was granted for the detachment of the listed building from the rest of the sheltered scheme, build of 2 new flats and new communal facilities. Start of work on site is anticipated May/June 2022.
- Takeley Day Centre/ Garage Site – a pre-planning application has been submitted to the Planning Department for the provision of up to 8 low carbon homes.
- Garden Reduction Sites – 4 possible garden reduction sites identified with potential as single building plots. Three outline planning applications have been submitted, with two of them approved to date.
- Section 106 Opportunities – Barratts Homes have accepted an offer for 18 one bedroom apartments on their Great Dunmow site, subject to Board approval from Barratts and member approval from the Council. An offer had also been accepted for one affordable rented 3 bedroom house on a S106 site in Saffron Walden but have now discovered that they are going with a different provider.

She confirmed that there is currently no further available land.

Members discussed the need to acquire land and the importance of a housing investment strategy.

Members agreed that further conversations were necessary with senior Members to ensure that the state of need is identified within the Local Plan to determine the future of the district.

The update was noted.

HB17 **ASSISTANCE POLICY - VERBAL UPDATE**

The Environmental Health Manager – Protection provided a verbal update on the Assistance Policy.

He confirmed that the assistance grants are being revised as labour and material costs have increased and agreed to circulate the updated policy for comment prior to the next Housing Board meeting. He noted that they have continued to engage with the Citizens Advice Bureau regarding the allocation of their £70,000 grant fund.

The update was noted.

HB18 **HOUSING STRATEGY ACTION PLAN**

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager provided an update within the Housing Strategy Action Plan.

Councillor Khan noted the additional resources required to deliver the detailed Housing Options service and questioned whether milestones would not be achieved.

The Housing Enabling and Development Officer confirmed that there would be mainly a financial impact.

The update was noted.

HB19 **UTTLESFORD NORSE PARTNERSHIP UPDATE - VERBAL UPDATE**

The Assistant Director of Housing and Environmental Services confirmed that Norse have promised to share their compliance data by the end of March.

Councillor Dean requested an additional meeting in April once the information has been received so that the Housing Board could be satisfied that Norse were carrying out their responsibilities and the Assistant Director of Housing and Environmental Services agreed to arrange this for the end of April and request the attendance of the Operations Director of Norse. She confirmed that fewer complaints are being received now that there is a new Operations Director in place.

Both the Chair and the member of the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel noted that there continued to be issues with outstanding repairs and complaints not being logged or followed up on.

The Assistant Director of Housing and Environmental Services resolved to follow up on the complaints raised.

Councillor Khan noted the need to hold Norse to account if they are failing to deliver and requested that the statistics are made available to the Housing Board at the earliest opportunity.

The Assistant Director of Housing and Environmental Services noted that some repairs, particularly doors and windows, were affected by supply chain delays caused by Covid and agreed to include a Norse update every quarter.

Councillor Reeve thanked Officers for their work supporting the people of Ukraine and noted their diligence.

Councillor Lemon reiterated Councillor Reeve`s comments.

The Assistant Director of Housing and Environmental Services confirmed that the team will be considering all options within the district stock, including the possibility of recommissioning Alexia House.

The Chair of the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel offered to help with refugees where they could.

HB20 **HOUSING BOARD FORWARD PROGRAMME**

The Housing Board Forward Programme was noted.

The meeting finished at 12:50.