

**HOUSING BOARD held at COMMITTEE ROOM - COUNCIL OFFICES,
LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, ESSEX CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY,
19 JANUARY 2023 at 11.00 am**

Present: Councillor A Coote (Chair)
Councillors G Driscoll, A Khan, P Lees and N Reeve

Officers in attendance: S Russell (Interim Director - Housing, Health and Communities),
C Gibson (Democratic Services Officer) and J Snares (Housing
Strategy and Operations Manager)

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

HB24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dean, Foley, Lemon and Merifield.

HB25 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2022 were approved as an accurate record.

HB26 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - PROPOSED RENT, SERVICE AND SUPPORT CHARGES 2023/24

The Interim Director of Housing, Health and Communities presented the report and initially took Members through the recommendations, the background and the impact of previous years' errors. She said the Council was working with Savills to develop an updated 30 year business plan for the HRA.

In response to various questions raised, it was stated that:

- An increase of 0.1% in garage rents amounted to the equivalent of 12p per week.
- It had been estimated that each 1% reduction in rent income could mean the loss of about 129 new homes over the life of the Business Plan.
- If rents were raised at levels below recommended it would impact on the ability over a longer period to deliver new homes and could impact on planned maintenance programmes.
- A Stock Condition Survey had been commissioned at a cost around £500,000 and that UDC would be looking to recover the cost from Uttlesford Norse. Without up to date stock condition data, it would not be possible to put an accurate planned work programme together.

The Interim Director of Housing, Health and Communities then took Members through the financial impact of dwelling rent increases; garage rents; service charges; Housing Related Support charges and Intensive Housing Management charges; heating, general services, water and sewerage charges; Garden Welfare. She also highlighted the Risk Analysis and the Equality and Health Impact Assessment.

Carole Mandy (Chair of the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel) reported back on their meeting held on 17 January 2023. She said that support had been given to the report but that it had not been unanimous. She highlighted additional pressures in terms of rent arrears' management, foodbanks and the large increases in sheltered housing charges.

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager outlined the support that could be provided by UDC in respect of rent arrears management, advice on income maximisation, housing benefits advice and possible access to discretionary housing payments. We have a tenancy sustainment officer who can work with tenants and we also refer people to CAB and other advice agencies. She stated that eviction was always the last resort and we always did all that we could to avoid this.. She also explained that the sheltered housing heating charges had to be increased to recognise the significant increases in energy costs..

The Chair said that all Councillors had been given the opportunity on previous occasions to look at the Council's budget figures and said that this overall difficult situation had been caused by the National Government.

In response to further questions, it was stated that:

- The vote at the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel had been 5 in support and 2 against.
- There was a clear need for the Council to promote support that was available to help the most vulnerable and to protect those in most need.
- The proposed redevelopment of sheltered accommodation units at Alexia House and Parkside would need to be delayed until 2024/25 at the earliest but that the Walden Place redevelopment could continue as planned.

The Chair said that in many ways this was the least worst option and asked Members to vote on the recommendations.

Members agreed with "heavy hearts" to the recommendations and it was:

RESOLVED that:

1. The Housing Board recommended to Cabinet for approval increases in HRA dwelling rents as follows:
 - General needs accommodation – a 7% increase in accordance with the cap set by central government
 - Supported accommodation – a 7% increase in accordance with the cap set by central government

- Formula rents to increase by the maximum permitted amount (11.1%, equivalent to CPI+1%), to be applied only when properties are relet.
 - Temporary accommodation – rents to be increased in line with formula rents as in previous years (i.e. 11.1%).
2. The Housing Board recommended to Cabinet for approval the increases in garage rent, support charges and service charges as detailed below:
- Garage rents are increased by the September 2022 CPI of 10.1%
 - Housing related support charges are increased in line with estimated costs for 2023/24
 - Intensive housing management and housing related support charges are increased in line with estimated costs for 2023/24 as detailed in paragraph 29
 - Heating, service and sewerage charges are increased in line with estimated costs for 2023/24 as detailed in paragraphs 30-31
 - Garden welfare charges, though continuing to be subsidised, are increased by 10%.

Councillor Driscoll highlighted that the wrong year had been shown on the Equality and Health Impact Assessment Checklist paragraphs 1 and 2. This would be corrected.

HB27 AOB

In response to a question about possible immediate usage of Alexia House for purposes other than for sheltered housing, the Housing Strategy and Operations Manager confirmed that this had been explored previously, but due to the significant works required to make the building habitable, this was not a viable option.

As this was likely to be the last Housing Board meeting before the local elections, Members thanked Housing officers, the representatives of the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel and Democratic Services officers for all their contributions to the Board.

The meeting finished at 12.20 pm .