

**HOUSING BOARD held at COMMITTEE ROOM - COUNCIL OFFICES,
LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, ESSEX CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY, 7
DECEMBER 2023 at 12.30 pm**

Present: Councillor A Coote (Chair)
Councillors S Barker, G Driscoll, C Fiddy and P Lees

Officers in attendance: K Clifford (Director of Housing, Health and Communities),
C Edwards (Democratic Services Officer) and J Snares
(Housing Strategy and Operations Manager)

HB1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Tayler and S Ovel, Vice Chair of the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel.

There were no declarations of interest.

HB2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th January 2023 were approved as an accurate record.

HB3 UPDATE ON REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR HOUSING

The Director of Housing, Health and Communities presented the report.

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

- Access to the property in this context did not relate to the Council trying to gain entry, but to the regulator, who had the right to enter a property and carry out repairs when a Landlord had not fulfilled their duties. The regulator would then pass the charges onto the Landlord.
- Data protection was not covered in this report it was within the Council's Governance.
- The individual standards would be circulated to Housing Board Members and an action plan would be brought to the next meeting.

HB4 TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURE SURVEY RESULTS

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager presented the survey results.

She made the following points:-

- The overall satisfaction rating had gone up to 81% in October 2023 from 71% in February 2023.
- Complaints handling had improved from 27% to 44%.

- There had been 503 people contacted for the survey but as it was anonymous they did not have a breakdown of the responses or how many complaints had been made.

The Director of Housing, Health and Communities said that there would be key performance indicators that could be brought to the meeting in the future which would give a more definitive view of complaints and how they were handled, as well as data from the Complaints Handling Code which would be available early next year.

The Chair said that it would provide standardised information as it would all be judged on the same basis.

In response to questions from Members regarding the mould and damp issues, Officers confirmed that everyone had been contacted who had either reported mold and damp issues or had taken part in the stock condition survey.

The Director of Housing, Health and Communities said there was guidance provided about the prevention of mould and damp but this had to be handled carefully to avoid judgement on anyone's lifestyle. She said there were grants available to help to provide ventilation where needed.

HB5 UPDATE ON RENT SETTING

The Director of Housing, Health and Communities introduced the report. She said that the mistakes had been rectified and all the rent refunds had been completed in August. She said that there were now robust processes in place to ensure that the same issues did not occur again.

She thanked all Officers for their hardwork in recalculating rents and sending out letters to all the residents that were involved.

Members noted the updates provided and that the Regulator would be updated as per the recommendations within the report. They agreed to approve the adoption of the Rent Setting Sign Off procedure and for it to go forward to Cabinet.

RESOLVED that:

The Housing Board approved the adoption of the Rent Setting Sign Off procedure and agreed that it should go forward to Cabinet for approval.

HB6 TENANT AND LEASEHOLDER PANEL - NEW CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

The Chair of the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel apologised that the Vice Chair was not able to come to the meeting.

HB7 **INDEPENDENT HOUSING OMBUDSMAN'S SCHEME COMPLAINTS HANDLING CODE SELF ASSESSMENT**

Members noted that the Complaints Policy would be reviewed further and recommended the approval to Cabinet of the self assessment of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code.

RESOLVED that:

The Housing Board recommended to Cabinet the approval of the self assessment of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code so that it could be published on Uttlesford District Council's website and made available to tenants.

HB8 **TIMELINE FOR COMPLETION OF THE HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN**

The Director of Housing, Health and Communities said that it was important to ensure the accuracy of the rent figures that were added to the business plan. She proposed a meeting in mid January to consider this in more detail.

She made the following comments: -

- Cabinet would be asked to approve the rent standards uplift of CBI + 1% which was 7.7%.
- It was important to maximise the rental income in order to provide the best service and to have the funds to carry out repairs.
- The proposal had been discussed at the tenant panel and after a robust discussion had been approved.
- The Service Charge was still being calculated, there was some on going concern about heating charges, however these were likely to come down slightly this year as the high prices had been predicted early and therefore projections were included in last year's charge.

HB9 **UNSL UPDATE**

The Director of Housing, Health and Communities pointed out a mistake in paragraph 12 the date should read January 2024. She also agreed to check the date that the report had previously been discussed at Scrutiny Committee.

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

- In order to deal with the backlog and bring down the length of time it was taking to process voids, UNSL had been asked to complete the voids within 30 days. This work had been mainly completed by Contractors and had caused an increase in costs to £16,000 per property, whereas the industry benchmark was £7,000.
- Uttlesford District Council are aware that the costs are too high and were monitoring the spend.
- Elderly residents can request a room a year to be decorated, it was not carried out as a matter of routine.

HB10 **DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager gave an update of current development:-

- Thaxted Road had been handed over in April and was in the 12 month defect period.
- Great Chesterford, 13 houses were handed over last December and it was coming to the end of the 12 month defect period.
- Takeley Garage Block in Beech Close and the redundant Day Centre – a planning application for 8 flats at an approximate cost of £1.3 million would be submitted.
- Woodland Park in Dunmow – 9 had been completed in July and phase 2 of 10 apartments were due to be completed in March 2024. Total cost of £3.5million funded partly by 'right to buy' receipts.
- Tye Green, Wimbish – a 4 bed house was being built and due to be completed in June 2024.
- Bungalow at The Mead in Thaxted this was a purpose built bungalow for one disabled tenant, and should be ready in August/September 2024.
- A garden plot at High Easter had been withdrawn.
- Parkside, 24 apartments for the over 60's near Abbey Lane planning permission had been granted, with an estimated cost of £4.5million hopefully including a Homes England grant of £1.4million towards the cost.
- Alexia House in Great Dunmow, 24 apartments for the over 60's. The planning application would go to the Planning Committee early in the new year. Estimated cost of £4million with a £1.5million social housing grant.
- The new communal area at Walden Place was near to completion, meaning that the grade 2 listed building could be sold separately with a valuation of approximately £1million.
- Ashdon, All Saints Close – looking to gain planning permission for 12 houses but due to the access, Highways have said the site can only take a maximum of 5 units. Therefore the viability of developing the site at the present time will be reviewed.

Councillor Lees left the meeting at 1:50pm.

HB11 **HOUSING KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

The Director of Housing, Health and Communities said that there needed to be a discussion about which of the performance indicators to monitor going forward. She agreed to circulate the current indicators so that Members could identify those that were useful and meaningful.

The meeting finished at 1.55 pm .