

HOUSING BOARD held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 10am on 7 DECEMBER 2017

Present: Councillor M Felton (Chairman)
Councillors T Farthing, A Gerard, J Loughlin, A Mills, V Ranger and J Redfern.

Also present: C Mandy and S Trimnell (Tenant Forum Representatives).

Officers in attendance: A Bochel (Democratic Services Officer), Doug Malins (Housing Strategy Manager), R Millership (Assistant Director – Housing & Environmental Services), J Snares (Housing Strategy and Operations Manager) and M Watts (Principal Environmental Health Officer (Protection)).

HB12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dean and Lees.

HB13 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2017 were received and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HB14 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT – PROPOSED RENT, SERVICE AND SUPPORT CHARGE INCREASE 2018-19

The Assistant Director – Housing and Environmental Services said there was not a lot of choice regarding annual rent-setting. The report recommended decreases in HRA dwelling rents, and that there be increases in garage rent, support and service charges. There had been a lot of debate last year about potential increases to support charges. However the proposed decrease in rent charges would soften the increase in rent charges.

RESOLVED that the Housing Board recommend to Cabinet that HRA dwelling rates be decreased and garage rent, service and support charges be increased as detailed in the report.

HB15 HRA LAND ASSET MANAGEMENT

The Housing Strategy Manager who was to present the next two items had been delayed, so the Chairman moved on to Item 6.

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager gave details related to the development plots. She said Duton Hill was a detached bungalow which was not in a good location for the Council to own an individual property. The Council

was putting in an application to develop it into a 4 bedroom property, and were aiming to secure planning permission in March. It would hopefully be sought after development.

Hilltop Lane was an application to build a two bedroom bungalow on part of a garden, and still leave a reasonable sized garden for the current property. The Housing team were hoping to get planning permission by January.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said that it was difficult to know how much revenue the Council would make from the two proposed developments. Councillor Mills said he estimated upwards of £300,000.

RESOLVED that, in line with the HRA Asset Management and Development Strategy and subject to Outline Planning Permission being granted for both sites, the Housing Board recommend to Cabinet:

- a. That the identified sites be sold on the open market by way of sealed bids, with a guide price for offers as advised by the selling agent. The guide price will be set to maximise income to the Housing Revenue Account whilst maintaining competitiveness and interest in the plots.
- b. That the receipt received is ring-fenced to fund the acquisition/development of new properties.

HB16

ALLOCATIONS POLICY AND HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY (VERBAL UPDATE)

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said there was a need to update Council policy to make changes that reflected new legislation in the Homelessness Reduction Act. After the meeting, updated documents showing the track changes made would be circulated for comment. The finalised documents would need to be circulated from 1 April.

Depending on the progress of the Local Plan, there was a possibility of taking a wider look at allocations policy in the future.

HB17

THE HOUSING AND PLANNING ACT – IMPLICATIONS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH (PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING) SERVICES

The Principal Environmental Health Officer (Protection) said the government had introduced a new set of penalties to target the finances of poor and rogue landlords, as well as a database of rogue landlords and letting agents, and banning orders for serious and prolific offenders. The Council now needed to devise a policy to assign a penalty to an offence.

The Housing and Planning Act 2016 also extended the list of reasons why the Council and tenants could apply to the First-tier Tribunal for a rent repayment order, requiring a landlord to repay a specified amount of rent.

A question remained as to how to target unapproved houses of multiple occupancy. New legislation allowed for the identification of rogue landlords through the rent deposit scheme, although criminal landlords might not use this scheme.

Councillor Redfern suggested that the Council's Communications Officer could help to spread messages about houses of multiple occupancy. In response, the Principal Environmental Health Officer (Protection) said there was already a lot of information to utilise. Council tax and census data could be used to cross-reference and identify private-rented houses in the borough, which could then be targeted to encourage the residents to make themselves known to the Council.

HB18

DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT UPDATE

The Principal Environmental Health Officer (Protection) said the Disabled Facilities Grant was brought into service at Uttlesford again in April, having previously been under the control of the Papworth Trust. The grant aimed to meet a range of public health and NHS outcomes. There was an increasing recognition that disabled residents tended to live in general, rather than specialised housing. Adaptations to housing helped to keep people out of care.

The Council received one of the lowest allocations for the grant in the country, but Uttlesford and other Councils were looking to redistribute funds amongst themselves. They were able to do this because some received more money for the grant than they were able to spend. Essex County Council would want Uttlesford District Council to do more if it were to receive additional money. The caseworker that the Council had hired to communicate with grant applicants had been vital in streamlining the process of providing adaptations to houses. This was paying dividends for those who applied successfully.

Councillor Gerard congratulated the Principal Environmental Health Officer (Protection) on the success of the scheme, and asked if there was a way that parish councils could help promote it. In response, the Principal Environmental Health Officer (Protection) said applicants were typically referred by doctors to occupational therapists, and in turn to Uttlesford District Council. The Council hoped to engage more with parish councils to ensure greater referral for the grant.

In response to questions from Councillor Mills, the Principal Environmental Health Officer (Protection) said pooling of the resources for the grant could be country-wide. The work required on properties was normally put out to tender to three suppliers and the supplier offering the best price would get the contract.

HB19

DEVELOPMENT UPDATE – VERBAL

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager updated Members on developments occurring across the District.

Reynolds Court, Newport

The development was on track, with Stage 2 of works currently in progress.

Hatherley Court, Saffron Walden

Phase 1 of work was progressing well, though a problem had occurred due to the need to divert mains water supply. The tenants were however being well-supported.

Sheds Lane, Saffron Walden

Workers were now on site at Sheds Lane.

Frambury Lane, Newport

The application had now received planning permission.

Newton Grove, Dunmow

The contract for work on Newton Grove was currently out to tender.

Councillor Gerard thanked the team for their work on Reynolds Court.

HB20

THE MOORS, LITTLE DUNMOW

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said the Moors site consisted of 12 bungalows but all had problems with subsidence. The site had been emptied quicker than had been expected. The Council now wanted to demolish these bungalows and replace them with a mixture of bungalows and flats. Right to buy receipts could be used on 4 properties. Japanese knotweed was present on the site and was currently being dealt with. The Housing Department had had preliminary discussions with the Planning Department about developing the site.

In response to a question from Councillor Mills, the Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said the development proposal for the site had not yet gone out for public consultation. The Assistant Director – Housing and Environmental Services said the Council had approached the developer of another site on the same road to see if they would be interested in a land swap. However, the developer had said the work was not going to happen because they were not in a position to go forward.

The Assistant Director – Housing and Environmental Services said the Council had to be careful not to be too ambitious when putting in applications because it could not appeal.

The Housing Strategy Manager entered the meeting.

The Housing Strategy Manager said the developers of the other site by the Moors would have worked on the development in the area in conjunction with the Council had the site have gone forward.

RESOLVED to recommend to Cabinet that the site is redeveloped in line with the detail contained in the report.

HB21

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Assistant Director – Housing and Environmental Services said that some authorities in high need areas of housing could raise their debt cap. She was trying to find out whether Uttlesford District Council would be able to do this.

The Council had originally taken out a loan for £89 million to help development, and were limited from accumulating £90 million of debt. The intention had been to start paying back the debt this year, until the government forced a reduction in rent.

Councillor Redfern said it was important for the department to work within its means.

The Assistant Director – Housing and Environmental Services said there were other schemes which the department was thinking of working on, such as Alexia House, Dunmow and Park Side Inn, Saffron Walden. The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said the Council had also taken over properties in Radwinter.

Councillor Redfern said the Council was able to allocate based on different criteria to Housing Assistance.

The meeting ended at 10:55am.