

## ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet

**Date:** 24 April 2018

**Subject:** Housing

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor S Stavrou

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**Recommending:**

**That the report of the Housing Portfolio Holder be noted.**

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### **Additional Housing Association Preferred Partners**

In 2007, the Council adopted a Scheme of Preferred Housing Association (HA) Partnering. The purpose of the Scheme is to work with specific housing associations - that have a proven track record of successfully providing affordable housing and of providing a good housing service to tenants - to identify, pursue and deliver affordable housing developments within the District.

The Scheme enables the Council to have a very good working relationship with a relatively small number of housing associations. Preferred HA Partners then have a much better understanding of the District's housing needs and the Council's expectations and are able to influence and improve the affordable housing provision on developments, as well as its design, due to their early involvement in schemes. They also provide useful advice, guidance and feedback to the Council on affordable housing issues and policies, and are able to bring in additional investment in the District, because they are all investment partners of Homes England (previously the Homes and Communities Agency). As Preferred Partners, they are able to increase and consolidate their housing stock within the District, thereby assisting them to reduce their unit management and maintenance costs and to achieve better value for money. All Preferred Partners have signed district-wide nomination agreements with the Council, setting out detailed nomination arrangements.

In view of the increased affordable housing opportunities that are now coming forward, as a result of increased interest from developers wanting to develop in the District, together with the increased development that will come forward once the Council's new Local Plan is adopted, it is important that the Council has a sufficient number of Preferred Partners who are committed to work in partnership with the Council to pursue and deliver affordable housing opportunities in the District. I have therefore appointed two new housing associations as Preferred Housing Association Partners of the Council – CHP and Aldwyck Housing Group.

CHP is based in Chelmsford and was established in 2002 as a result of a stock transfer from Chelmsford City Council. They are an approved Homes England investment partner and have recently been shortlisted in the Development Programme of the Year category for the UK Housing Awards. CHP has 8,160 social rented and affordable rented properties located in 13 of the 14 districts in Essex. The only district that they don't currently have stock in is Epping Forest. They are therefore very keen to undertake new developments in the District.

Aldwyck Housing Group has been providing affordable housing across the South East and East of England since 1968. They currently provide over 11,000 homes and management services for around 25,000 people in a variety of tenures, including rented (6,700 homes), shared ownership (1,090 homes) and owner-occupied homes. They also provide specialist support and accommodation for young people, those with disabilities and older people (745 homes). They are very keen to work within the Epping Forest, and have already secured two sites in the District - despite not yet being a Preferred Housing Association Partner of the Council.

I have also agreed with East Thames Housing Association (who have now merged with London & Quadrant Housing Society) that they will no longer be a Preferred Housing Association Partner of the Council.

The Council's Preferred Partners are therefore as follows:

- Aldwyck Housing Group
- B3 Living
- CHP
- Hastoe Housing Association (Specialist rural partner)
- Moat Group

### **Commencement of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017**

The new homelessness provisions of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 commenced on 3 April 2018.

Under the Act, and the new associated Homelessness Code of Guidance, there are considerable additional duties placed upon authorities nationally to prevent and reduce homelessness.

The main additional duties are (in summary) as follows:

- The period that a person can be considered to be threatened with homelessness, or it is likely that they will become homeless, is extended from 28 days to 56 days
- An applicant is now considered to be threatened with homelessness at the point the Section 21 Notice (which is the standard notice period provided by private landlords to tenants and is recognised as the single biggest cause of homelessness) has been served as opposed to at the end of the notice period. This also prevents councils advising applicants to remain in occupation beyond the expiry of the notice
- Placing an emphasis on services preventing homelessness from occurring - strengthening the duties on local authorities to provide advice, securing accommodation and other help available
- A duty to carry out an assessment of an applicant's case, notifying the applicant of the assessment in writing and the provision of a Personalised Housing Plan in order to provide effective support
- A requirement to secure accommodation (under the new "Relief Duty") for at least 6 months for all applicants who the Council is satisfied are eligible for assistance
- Right to Reviews for a range of decisions made by the Council

Due to the additional burdens being placed on authorities, the Government has provided financial support to help meet with the consequences of the new duties. The Council will receive three grants in total. Set out below are the amounts received under each of the grants and the various uses that have been agreed by the Cabinet.

#### *Flexible Homelessness Support Grant*

Under the Government's Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (required to be ring-fenced and only used for homelessness services), the Council received £277,000 in 2017/18 and will receive £313,000 in 2018/19. The Cabinet agreed that these grants should be used as follows:

- Continuing to work with Genesis Housing Association to provide private rented accommodation to homeless applicants in order to prevent homelessness;
- Meeting the housing-related support costs of the young parents scheme at Railway Meadow, Ongar;
- Funding an additional part-time Deputy Hostel Manager post at Norway House, North Weald - the Council's Homeless Persons' Hostel;
- Funding additional rental and damage deposit guarantee loans given to homeless applicants to secure private rented accommodation;
- Re-introducing a Preventing Repossession Fund – to provide loans to potentially homeless applicants to continue to occupy their existing accommodation;
- Funding up to 9 single homeless applicants to be accommodated at the Zinc Arts Project;
- Funding landlord incentive payments of £2,000 per property, to enable Genesis Housing Association to secure additional private rented housing to accommodate homeless applicants for a minimum period of 2 years;
- Providing funding of £10,500 to CHESS (Churches Homeless Emergency Support Scheme) to provide an outreach service to visit, and provide advice and assistance to, rough sleepers in the District.

#### *Homelessness Reduction Act Grant*

The Council received a further £134,000 under the Government's Homelessness Reduction Act Grant. The Cabinet agreed that, in order to assist with meeting the additional duties of the Act, a new post of Homelessness Strategy Officer be created on a temporary contract for 3 years.

#### *Further Flexible Homelessness Support Grant*

The Government has very recently announced further allocations of Flexible Homelessness Support Grant for next year (2019/2020). The Grant is ring-fenced for a third year "to enable authorities to focus where possible on homelessness prevention." It is expected that the Council will receive around £358,000 in 2019/2010. A report will be considered by Members at a later date to consider options for its use.

### **Strategy and Statement on Anti-Social Behaviour Policies and Procedures**

At its meeting on 13 March 2018, the Communities Select Committee considered and endorsed the Council's proposed new Strategy and Statement on Anti-Social Behaviour Policies and Procedures and passed on its comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder for incorporation.

The Strategy and Statement has been formulated in accordance with the provisions of the Housing Act 1996 and the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014. It meets the requirement of the Housing Act 1996 that all social landlords must publish a Statement of their policies and procedures on anti-social behaviour, together with an associated summary. The Council's summary is produced in leaflet form and will be updated when the draft Strategy and Statement has been agreed.

The Strategy and Statement will next be considered by the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Panel at its meeting on 23 April 2018 prior to me formally approving the document.

## **Single Homelessness Accommodation – Norway House Pods**

On Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> April, I'm pleased to say that the Area Planning (East) Sub-Committee gave the Council planning permission for the provision of three units of modular accommodation (pods) at Norway House, North Weald, to accommodate 6 single homeless people. Although permanent planning permission was sought, the Sub-Committee gave approval for a 10-year temporary period.

Tenders are now being prepared, ready to start works on site in July 2018.

## **Council Housebuilding Programme**

Since the last Council meeting in February 2018, much has happened with the Council Housebuilding Programme - with further completions of two 3-bed houses and two 2-bed flats at Bluemans End, North Weald and a single 3-bed house at London Road, Stapleford Abbots. In June 2018, further completions are planned for Stewards Green Road, Springfield and Centre Avenue in Epping and at Parkfields, Coopersale.

In March 2018, the Development Agency Contract with East Thames ended after its 4-year period. For the future, instead of continuing to use an external organisation to oversee the delivery of the Housebuilding Programme, the Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee agreed that developments should be managed in-house, using internal staffing resources, supplemented by specialist design consultancies appointed directly by the Council. At its meeting in April 2018, the Cabinet Committee therefore approved the appointment of ECD Architects Ltd as the Architects and Multi-disciplinary Design Team, and Airey Millar Ltd as the Employers Agents, with each appointment based on a quality/price/interview (50/40/10) assessment following an EU procurement exercise.

A further framework of four contractors was also approved, comprising: Neilcott Construction Ltd; Roof Ltd; TSG Building Services Ltd; and Indecon Building Ltd. This was based on a quality/price/interview (60/30/10) evaluation, from which second-stage tenders will be sought to construct future homes under the Programme.

A number of sites where the Council has either failed to obtain planning permission, or where schemes had been withdrawn, were re-presented to the Cabinet Committee at the April meeting to decide on their most appropriate future use. The Cabinet Committee decided that seven sites in Loughton, Matching Green, Roydon, Nazeing and Epping should be re-designed and re-submitted for planning approval.

The Committee also agreed that local residents should be consulted on proposals to provide off-street parking schemes on a further three sites in Waltham Abbey, Buckhurst Hill and Nazeing, on the basis that users are charged for the use of the parking bays provided. If there is insufficient interest shown by residents for such parking schemes in their area, then the Cabinet Committee agreed that the site(s) should be sold on the open market, with the sale proceeds being recycled back into the Council Housebuilding Programme.

The Committee also agreed that consideration of the site at Mallion Court, Waltham Abbey should be deferred for 12 months, until after the new Leisure Centre has been completed.

## **Review of the Housing Repairs Service**

With just 2 years remaining for the current "in-sourced" Repairs Management Contract with Mears, the Council has appointed Cameron Consulting to undertake a detailed option appraisal for the future delivery of the Housing Repairs Service beyond 2020. The review includes consideration of the following options:

- Outsourced Service – Where the entire Housing Repairs Service would be competitively tendered and subsequently delivered by an outsourced commercial partner;

- In-House Service – Where EFDC would deliver the service itself, using in-house resources (directly employed personnel).
- Insourced Service – Which would be similar to the current service provided by Mears, where the service would be overseen by an external contractor, who manages the Council's staff. However, other aspects of the service could be outsourced, such as the provision of material supplies, IT (repairs ordering) and an out of hours call centre.
- Other Delivery Options – including a joint venture, wholly-owned subsidiary and a shared service.

Cameron Consulting will soon be holding a stakeholder engagement process with key members, officers and tenant representatives. Ultimately, whatever delivery model is adopted by the Cabinet, it must meet the Council's objectives for delivering a quality customer-focused, affordable and value for money service.

The outcome of the Review will be reported to the Cabinet prior to any decision being made on the preferred option.