

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet
Date: 28 July 2022
Subject: Housing & Community Portfolio
Portfolio Holder: Councillor H Whitbread

Recommending:

That the report of the Housing & Community Portfolio Holder be noted.

Executive Summary

The following report provides an update on progress in the following areas:

Housing Strategy

Public consultation on the review of the Housing Strategy concluded on 27 June 2022. The 151 respondents overwhelmingly supported the proposed priorities, aims and objectives, and the partnership approach to delivering the Strategy. Stronger Communities Select Committee has since made recommendations for both the Consultation Outcome Report and the Draft Housing Strategy to be presented to Cabinet in September 2022 for consideration and approval.

Homelessness

The Homelessness Triage Officers have been busy supporting the governments Homes for Ukraine Scheme over the past few months by administering cash payments to Ukraine Refugees arriving in Epping Forest District. The officers have worked incredibly well supporting this initiative while continuing their day jobs operating the front doors to the homelessness service.

To date, 104 payments have been made totalling £20,800. Essex County Council have now taken on the responsibility to issue these payments via pre-paid cards and have set up an email address for any enquiries in this respect: businesssupport.familyops@essex.gov.uk

Rehousing

The team is continuing to prepare for the new Housing Allocations Scheme, which goes live this September.

They have also been able to advertise more newly built houses being delivered in September, on two different sites located in Loughton and Waltham Abbey and already have lots of bidders interested in these properties.

Norway House

The residents at Norway House enjoyed a Jubilee Party, which included craft activities, a disco and party food. The children made a giant banner which was displayed during the Ride London event. Staff have arranged two Play in the Park sessions during the summer holidays, where the Children will enjoy different outdoor play activities.

Property and Assets

The Property and Asset team is preparing for the introduction of extensive regulation and legislation largely as a result of the Dame Judith Hackett 'Building a Safer Future' report following the Grenfell Enquiry (mainly around building safety and consumer regulation).

Earlier in the year the team commissioned an independent review of compliance against current and new legislation and the findings are currently being translated into a proposed action plan to present to Stronger Communities Select Committee and Cabinet for consideration.

Resident Involvement

A Tenant Census will be carried out this summer to understand the profile and needs of residents in Council owned stock. This has been designed to enable direct comparison with the 2021 National Census Data.

The team has been working with residents to co-create a new Resident Involvement Strategy which is about to go out to public consultation. This is supported by the Getting Involved Facebook page www.facebook.com/efdcgetinvolved and a web-based communication 'micro-site' that is being developed for Resident Involvement.

Estate Improvements

The hugely successful and popular collaborative approach to estate improvements and enhancements with residents has recently included tree and flower planting, 13 new bin stores, replacing old Jockey style railings and parking bollards across 22 sites to deter anti-social behaviour and protect green spaces.

Neighbourhoods

A new specialist hoarding contractor has been appointed which has already led to some great outcomes on long term hoarding cases. Residents are receiving ongoing support to manage these issues and arrangements are being made to train staff on dealing with low-level hoarding.

The targeted approach to combatting non-compliance with gas and electric works has secured 4 injunctions since the new financial year to ensure identified residents and others around them are safe.

Caretaking & Cleaning

The service now has a fully electric fleet and have invested in some state-of-the-art efficient cleaning equipment. Three cleaners have obtained City and Guilds certification and the new graffiti removal machine is available across the District.

Incomes

The Income team is using the new access to Paynet 360 to accept rent and arrears payments directly from residents and are now using Allpay to setup direct debits with residents.

The Courts are now starting to get back to pre-Covid schedules, which is gradually increasing the number of hearings to secure Court orders to address rent arrears.

Home Ownership

The Home Ownership Team now manages 1,087 leasehold properties - some of which are in regeneration areas. Consultation is underway with affected leaseholders over their contributions to maintenance and improvements to the block that houses their property. Individual circumstances will be taken into account and may include the opportunity to extended payment terms of up to 10 years. Improvements to the surrounding area, e.g. pocket parks and outside Gyms will not be recharged to leaseholder, they will improve greatly the environment for all residents.

Housing Development

The teams has completed 34 units to date, providing much needed 1,2- & 3-Bedroom homes to our residents, most recently in Loughton, Buckhurst Hill, Waltham Abbey and Ongar. Pick Hill in Waltham Abbey is being named after Councillor D Spinks and will include a formal opening event.

A commitment has been made to build to Passive Haus energy efficiency standards, where it is viable to do so. The team will consult residents and Councillors at an early stage on the next phase of development (phase 5) - projected to deliver over 80 units including the first regeneration project in Shelly. Up to 50 further units are being considered on a variety of sites across the District.

An recent internal audit of the service received a substantial rating with no recommendations. The highest rating that can be received.

Grant funding of £1.4 million has been secured from Homes England. Staff are preparing for Homes England to audit one of our sites. This having successfully received full compliance (green standard) for the first EFDC site that Homes England selected to audit last August.

If you have any questions or would like further information please contact Janice Nuth Housing Strategy Manager (Interim) Jnuth@eppingforestdc.gov.uk