

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

**Committee:** Cabinet

**Date:** 17 December 2020

**Subject:** Housing and Community Services Portfolio

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor H Whitbread

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**Recommending:**

**That the report of the Housing and Community Services Portfolio Holder be noted.**

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### **Executive Summary**

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

#### Older People's Services

The Older People's Service continue to support our older and vulnerable tenants whilst in lockdown. We have continued with our decision to keep the communal areas closed to support our residents with social distancing.

Following the recent review, our asset team are reviewing the capital programme to include some of the recommendations. In addition, capital has been provided in next year's budget to allow for the development of scooter storage.

#### Income Recovery

The team continue to work in challenging conditions in terms of trying to collect rent in a difficult climate. The team have put in place extra measures to support tenants who are experiencing challenges due to Covid 19. This includes providing one to one support and if required engaging with other agencies to ensure a holistic approach is taken.

#### Estate and Land Team

The estate and land team have embarked on a number of projects to improve the environment and create places where people want to live

Limes Farm – the team have worked with the resident's group to reinstate the football pitch; this includes new goals which were installed on the 26 November 2020.

Growing Project – the team have been partnered with the community wellbeing team to create a project which works with local people to create small sensory areas. Several are planned for Waltham Abbey. Also, a wildflower meadow is planned.

#### Asset Management

Significant changes have been made to the way the team carryout inspections, they are now being carried out in partnership with the Estate and Land Team using an IT solution called Photobook. This allows accurate reporting to be emailed directly from the tablet and saves on time and resources. Furthermore, the teams are working together on estate enhancements and block improvements. The first major refurbishment is planned for Limes Farm in 21/22.

## Housing White paper

The Housing White Paper was published this week. This is likely to have major implications for us as a Council, not least, the vastly increased scrutiny and regulation. Members can expect a briefing paper shortly. Briefly the main points to highlight are:

- A strengthened role of the existing Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) in consumer regulation and safety with links across to the new Building Safety Regulator;
- Social landlords must identify a nominated person responsible for Health & Safety;
- A consultation is being launched on fitting of smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms to be followed by consultation on improved measures for electrical safety;
- A new suite of draft KPIs is proposed (although not referred to as KPIs but as “tenant satisfaction measures”) The RSH will be responsible for finalising the KPIs and will consult further. There will also be a small number of “financial measures” including Chief Executive salary & management costs. League tables are not specifically mentioned but it’s clear that tenants must be able to compare their landlord’s performance;
- Social landlords must also identify a senior person responsible for ensuring compliance with consumer standards;
- Landlords must also provide a clear breakdown of how their income is being spent;
- The democratic filter for complaints to the Housing Ombudsman will be removed and there will be a national awareness campaign for tenants and residents on how to complain;
- The “serious detriment test” will be removed and the existing cap on fines for breaches of regulations lifted;
- There are plans for a new inspection regime of inspections of landlords by the Regulator every 4 years;
- Tenant engagement will be improved through a programme of engagement and a requirement for landlords to seek out best practice. Government will introduce a new “Empowerment Programme” to support residents and there will be a review of professional training & development; and
- There will be a review of the Decent Homes Standard

## Development

Our programme to build and accrue housing continues and is progressing as expected, albeit apart from some short delays due to Covid. We continue to review our programme as further opportunities arise.

The phase 5 programme will be presented shortly to CHBCC for approval, in addition there may be an opportunity for the Council to purchase the affordable stock from Qualis.