

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF HOUSING SCRUTINY STANDING PANEL
HELD ON TUESDAY, 22 JANUARY 2008
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 5.30 - 6.41 PM**

Members Present:	S Murray (Chairman), Mrs R Gadsby (Vice-Chairman), K Angold-Stephens, Mrs H Harding, Mrs J Lea, Mrs P K Rush and Mrs M Carter (Epping Forest Tenants and Leasholders Federation)
Other members present:	Mrs D Collins
Apologies for Absence:	Mrs P Richardson and J Wyatt
Officers Present	A Hall (Director of Housing), P Pledger (Assistant Head of Housing Services (Property and Resources)), R Wilson (Assistant Head of Housing Services (Operations)) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

Also in attendance:

15. SUBSITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

The Panel noted that there were no substitute members.

16. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The Panel noted that there were no declarations of interest.

17. MINUTES FROM LAST MEETING - 25 OCTOBER 2007

The minutes from the last meeting were noted and agreed.

Under paragraph 8 in the minutes, on the strategy on Energy Efficiency, it was noted that, following the recent accident in another part of the country with a faulty thermostat, the Housing Assets Section had started carrying out assessments on the thermostats in the Council's housing stock. This was pre-empting any Government advice or guidelines.

Under paragraph 11, it was noted that the Government had now published its latest Housing Bill, which provided clarification of the ambiguous advice previously received regarding a new requirement to ensure armed forces personnel were treated as if they had local connections. It had been made clear that this was only in relation to the local connection that armed forces personnel had made with the District in which they were living and not with the District in which they were living prior to joining the forces. This would therefore not apply to our District and the Allocations Scheme would not have to be amended, contrary to the views expressed by officers at the previous meeting. Councillor Mrs Lea was concerned that this would lead to members of the armed forces losing their connections with their family county. She was assured that as the Housing Allocations Scheme was reviewed every year,

members could raise this as a matter of concern at the next review to be considered for inclusion in the scheme.

18. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

The Terms of Reference and the Work Programme were noted.

In response to a question of clarification the Director of Housing explained that the London Commuter Belt Housing Sub Region was defined as all of Hertfordshire and five districts in Essex.

19. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2007/08

The Director of Housing introduced the progress report on the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2007/08. The Panel noted that the format was prescribed by the Government. The last Business Plan was produced in April last year. The Panel will have next year's plan to review at it's next meeting.

Councillor Angold-Stephens asked why the results from the recent census were not available as yet. The Director of Housing replied that the returned forms were currently being put on the computer but staff had had other priorities. The census form went out to all council tenants with a good return rate. He agreed that it was important to compile the returns as soon as possible.

Asked if there were any problems in introducing the new computer systems (the Leasehold Services module and the Estate Management module), the Director of Housing replied that they were still awaiting staff resources from the corporate ICT Service. He would shortly be having a meeting with the relevant Director to take this forward. They were looking to buy the Estate Management System once it has been evaluated properly. They were also looking at web based applications and how they could be put on their system. The Panel noted that there was a general review of the Council's IT systems currently taking place.

Asked how many people had made use of the facility for tenants to apply for the Housing Register on-line the Assistant Head of Housing said that he did not have the figures to hand but would find out.

Councillor Angold-Stephens asked to see a demonstration of the whole IT system if possible. The Director of Housing said if the members wanted a demonstration it could be arranged. They may also be interested in looking at the Choice Based Lettings "back office" IT system which was currently operational.

In reply to a question on the number and types of "Tenant Talkback Panels" the Director of Housing replied that a number of different types were intended. Forums were in place, for the elderly sheltered housing tenants, and for rural tenants specifically to discuss rural issues. The new talkback panels could cover aspects such as housing management and repairs and maintenance. These would be conducted with a small number of people and run more on a task and finish basis, but they are still in the planning stage.

The Chairman asked about the delayed publication of the calendar for tenants, promoting the activities of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation; he was told by Mrs Carter that the idea came too late to organise and print it for this year. They will take this up again in winter 2008.

A member wondered if the improved telecare service from the Council's Careline Control Service would impose an additional burden on Careline staff. He was told that it should not do so. They are also looking at accreditation from the Telecare Services Associations (TSA). They will be carrying out a review this year of the Careline Service to go to this Panel and the Cabinet. Housing have also looked into offering the Careline service to other local authorities but will have to have TSA accreditation.

It was noted that service standard leaflets would be available before the end of the financial year.

A member wanted to know if repairs were prioritised with tenants who had ASBO's in mind. He was told that repairs were prioritised according to their urgency.

It was noted that a Sub-Regional group would be considering OT's being jointly employed by EFDC and County Social Care.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel had considered and were content with the Progress Report for the Key Action Plan contained within the HRA Business Plan 2007/08.

20. CHOICE BASED LETTINGS - UPDATE

The Assistant Head of Housing (Operations) updated the Panel on the latest progress made on the Choice Based Letting Scheme.

The Panel noted that:

- The scheme went live on 19 November 2007 jointly with Uttlesford District Council and Brentwood Borough Council.
- The other three authorities (Chelmsford, Broxbourne and East Herts.) would be joining them later this year.
- There were 588 applicants who participated in the scheme during the first three cycles, this being about 16% of all applicants on the Housing Register.
- Uttlesford reported 15% participation.
- The scheme will be publicised more, and a survey will be conducted to find out why some people were not participating.
- Events have been held to inform various organisations who help vulnerable people to inform them of the scheme so that they could participate.
- A Scheme User Guide is also available.
- There is to be a six month review of the scheme presented to the Panel, which will include figures on what bands were allocated.

21. REPORTS TO BE MADE TO THE NEXT MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chairman agreed to report briefly to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee all the reports considered at this meeting.

22. FUTURE MEETINGS

The Panel noted that the next meeting was scheduled for 18 March 2008.