

# **Report to the Council**

**Subject: Housing**

**Date: 18 December 2007**

**Portfolio Holder: Councillor D Stallan**

**Item: 7(g)**

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## **Recommending:**

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

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## **Springfields Improvement Scheme**

I am pleased to report that works started on the major £4m improvement scheme at Springfields, Waltham Abbey on 5 November 2007, and is due to be completed in February 2009, based on a 15 month contract period. It was hoped that the Council could benefit from a reduced contract period, and a reduced tender sum offered by the contractor, Apollo London, in their tender. However, this has not been possible due to the Contractor having to rely on the statutory authorities laying and relocating the mains services to achieve the proposed shorter contract period, which is highly unlikely, especially since the statutory authorities are outside of the Contractor's and the Council's control.

## **Choice Based Lettings**

I am also pleased to report that HomeOption, the Council's new choice based lettings scheme, successfully went live at the end of November 2007. The website went live and the first issue of the Freesheet was available from the 23<sup>rd</sup> November, with expressions of interest invited up to Noon on the 28<sup>th</sup> November.

Two of the Council's Consortium partners (Uttlesford District Council and Brentwood Borough Council) also went live on the same day. The remaining three (Broxbourne, Chelmsford and East Herts Councils) will join the scheme at different times in 2008.

A total of 44 properties were advertised through 25 adverts in the first cycle (since there were a number of vacancies for the same type of property). There were a total of 1,627 expressions of interest, averaging 65 expressions per advert. The most expressions of interested received for one property was 106; one property received no expressions of interest. Housing applicants expressed their interests in the following ways in the first cycle:

Website	- 83.7 %
Telephone	- 6.4 %
Text	- 4.8 %
Coupon	- 4.2 %
By staff	- 1.0 %

The Housing Scrutiny Panel will continue to monitor progress with the scheme over the first six months of implementation.

Members received a presentation from officers on HomeOption in October, and a copy of the Scheme User Guide has been sent to all members.

## **Wickfields, Chigwell**

In 2006, the Council transferred its sheltered housing scheme at Wickfields, Chigwell to Home Housing, through a small-scale stock transfer. The reason for the transfer was to enable a major improvement / conversion scheme to take place, primarily to convert all the difficult-to-let bedsits into self contained one bedroom flats.

I am pleased to report that the improvement scheme has now been completed and the refurbished flats have been advertised through the HomeOption Scheme.

An event to commemorate the re-opening has been arranged for the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2008. All Members of Council will receive an official invite in due course, but in the meantime members may want to note the date in their diaries.

### **Matching Tye Rural Housing Scheme**

The third rural housing scheme in the District has recently been completed in Matching Tye. The scheme has been developed by Hastoe Housing Association, the Council's Preferred Rural RSL Partner, who worked closely with the Parish Council.

The development was granted planning permission as an exception to normal planning policy, on condition that the properties are only occupied by people in housing need with a local connection with the village.

It is hoped that an event to celebrate the completion will be held in early 2008.

### **Bansons Hall, Ongar**

The Council's Cabinet has previously agreed to lease Bansons Hall, in Bansons Way, Ongar to Ongar Parish Council, to enable the Parish Council to relocate its Council Offices from Love Lane. I am pleased to report that the lease was signed at the end of November 2007, enabling the Parish Council to commence the required conversion works.