

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 22 April 2008

Subject: Housing

Portfolio Holder: Councillor D Stallan

Item:

Recommending:

That the report of the Housing Portfolio Holder be noted

Official Opening – Clifford Close, Matching Tye

On the 13th March 2008, the Chairman of Council officially opened Clifford Close at an event attended by a number of members.

This rural housing scheme, developed by Hastoe Housing Association under the Council's "planning exceptions" policy, comprises four rented properties (at affordable rents) and four shared ownership properties, to assist local people enter home ownership.

The planning exceptions policy allows planning permission to be granted for residential accommodation in rural areas in the Green Belt, as an exception to normal planning policy, provided that the accommodation is only occupied by residents - or past residents - of the village or neighbouring villages.

HomeSwapper Mutual Exchange Scheme

At the beginning of April, the Council introduced a new "HomeSwapper" scheme, which enables housing applicants to register for a mutual exchange on line, and to search on line for properties occupied by tenants with whom they may want to exchange. This new service means that housing applicants wanting an exchange no longer have to come to one of the Council's housing offices to view the Mutual Exchange Register, but can obtain details about properties they are interested in from their own home. Applicants registering for an exchange can also provide photographs of their property. Hard copies of available properties will continue to be available at Council offices for those who do not have access to the internet. Such tenants can also ask the Council's Housing Options Team to register on their behalf.

In addition, the new service provides a facility whereby applicants can register for e-mail and text alerts, informing them of new properties that meet their search criteria that have been added to the database in the previous week.

Home Ownership Grants

The Cabinet has previously agreed to introduce a Home Ownership Grants Scheme to assist Council tenants to purchase a property on the open market, thereby assisting them into home ownership and to free-up a vacant Council property at the same time, which can then be let to an applicant on the Council's Housing Register. Under the scheme, five grants of £34,000 are available, which is equivalent to the maximum discount available under the Right to Buy.

Letters were sent to all Council tenants informing them of the scheme. In response, 159 application forms were requested, which resulted in 38 applications. These applications are currently being assessed, and the grants will be offered to those tenants who will be vacating properties for which there is the greatest demand.