

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet
Date: 28 February 2023
Subject: Housing and Community Portfolio
Portfolio Holder: Councillor H Whitbread

Recommending:

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

Homelessness prevention and relief

A total of 55 applications for assistance were received during December 2022, significantly fewer than usual bearing in mind Christmas closure.

Increasing demand

We've seen a 22% increase in homelessness applications which are largely being driven by the following three causes of homelessness.

1. **Domestic Abuse** - The Domestic Abuse Act received royal assent in April 2021, and we have continued to see a rise in presentations where domestic abuse is the reason for homelessness. In Q3 of 2021, we took a total of 6 homeless applications with domestic abuse as the sole reason for the approach. In Q3 of 2022, we took a total of 14 applications where domestic abuse was the sole reason for approach – **that's an increase of 133% on the same period last year.**
2. **Family License Terminations** – This has always been the leading cause of homelessness within Epping Forest District, as it is for most councils, but we are seeing a steady rise in applications where family are no longer willing to accommodate each other and I think, certainly for last quarter and those moving forward, this can largely be attributed to the cost-of-living crisis first and foremost. In Q3 of 2021, we took a total of 22 homeless applications where family/friends were asking a member of their household to leave. In Q3 of 2022, we took a total of 38 homeless applications where family/friends were asking a member of their household to leave – **that's an increase of 72% on the same period last year.**
3. **End of privately rented accommodation** – This is the second leading cause of homelessness within Epping Forest District. We're seeing an increasing number of landlords selling their accommodation because of financial hardship. Equally, the main reason for customers approaching us from this type of tenure is because they're worried about being able to afford it. In Q3 of 2021, we took a total of 10 applications where the ending of privately rented accommodation was the reason for homelessness. In Q3 of 2022, we took a total of 19 applications where the ending of privately rented accommodation was the reason for homelessness - **that's an increase of 90% on the same period last year.**

Norway House- Christmas (Eleanor Green)

The residents of Norway House were once again overwhelmed by the kindness of the local community this Christmas. We received the following donations over the Christmas period:

- Upper Clapton Rugby Club – provided a Christmas present for every child
- St Mary's Church Shenfield – provided Christmas pyjamas for 80 children, as well as an amazing donation of £823
- Hereward Primary School – provided 80 chocolate selection boxes for the children
- Epping Forest Foodbank – provided Christmas food hampers for 80 households, as well as gifts for our adult residents
- North Weald Parish Council – provided a donation of £110 towards the cost of the children's Christmas party, which took place on 15th December
- Epping Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception – provided a donation of £500 to our Stakeholder Partnership Fund
- North Weald Facebook group – donated £500 worth of toys and food
- Millers Estate Agents – provided a professional Father Christmas for the children's party

Housing Development Update

Good progress is being made with our Pentlow and Woollard Street developments on site. We expect these units to handover in September 2023, providing a further 15 homes for affordable rent. We will have a scheme opening for Pentlow Way to honour the late James Brokenshire MP who the scheme will be named after. We are going to be a part of the public consultation on the St Johns Baptist Church, that we have been working on with the local Church and our Architects.

We are pleased to report that we have a pipeline of delivery from our strategic partnerships with RPs providing over 90 units of shared ownership and affordable rented units between May 2023 and September 2024. We are in discussions with the RPs to visit these schemes in the coming months to see how progress is going.

Sheltered Housing:

Emergency Alarm Upgrade

We have cancelled the emergency alarm upgrade contract that was awarded to Doro & Everon. The reason being they failed to deliver a service in addition to compatibility issues with our alarm monitoring provider Tunstall Healthcare.

As you know there is a requirement to upgrade the alarm system due to the analogue signal being discontinued in 2025 and the alarm monitoring contract coming to an end in November 2024.

It makes sense to undertake a tender exercise through a Framework agreement to procure a new alarm system and monitoring service from one provider for our sheltered housing schemes. This will ensure end to end compatibility alleviating the problem we encountered with Doro & Everon.

Continuation of Refurbishments

Following the successful refurbishment of Frank Bretton House, work is due commence imminently on Hyde Mead House, Nazeing. Residents have been consulted and have chosen their preferred mood board and easy/dining chairs. Once the contract has been signed and sealed work will commence which we envisage will take 12 weeks to complete. We will then move onto Parsonage Court, Loughton.

New “Needs Led” Support Model for residents in sheltered housing

On 20th December 2022 Cabinet agreed our new support service to residents and all being well this will commence 3rd April 2023.

Having listened to our residents and those considering a move to sheltered housing, we realise that the service we provide at present, which is a daily welfare check has become out of date. Residents want a more flexible service but more importantly they want peace of mind knowing that if/when they need support it will be available to them. To achieve this within our sheltered schemes, we have drafted a new model of support, one that is flexible and needs led, allowing us to spend quality time with those residents that have genuine support needs. Staff will work from a hub which will be our Careline centre in Loughton

As part of the modernisation of older people services we are replacing the term “Sheltered Housing” with “Independent Living” and staff titles will change to “Independent Living Officers”. We are currently deciding on a new logo and hope to hold a launch event in Spring.

Mobility Scooter Storage

We have secured funding which has enabled us to convert garages at Jessopp Court and Hyde Mead House into much needed storage for residents with motorised scooters. All being well these will be ready for use in April.

Flowers In Bloom

Due to the great success of last year’s flowers in bloom competition which will be holding the event again this year. Residents submit their entries during June and July. The judging which last year was undertaken by Eleanor Green takes place during August and a presentation event is held in October which is attended by the Chairmen of the Council.

New Ways of working for Property Surveyors

A new pre inspection form has been put together for mobile working to enable the property surveyors to undertake pre-void inspections this will enable us to provide Qualis with more detailed information before they receive the Void which in turn will enable them to plan works in advance with view to improving key to key times.

Property Surveyors will be starting to carry out Estate inspections and we have a developed a mobile working form to record property asset inspections and record and order urgent repairs to reduce hazards.

Fire Door Surveys

We are developing a mobile working inspection form for property surveyors to carry out Fire Door inspections and order any remedial works to ensure they are compliant.

Water Tank Project

We are undertaking a survey of approximately 400 water tanks to establish their condition and any subsequent remedial works and identifying dead legs and whether tanks can be removed. This will reduce the risk of leaks.

Energy Programme

We have developed a computer programme that extracts the information from PDF invoices from utility providers and these are batched against cost codes to enable better analysis and faster payment of invoices. This is currently being outsourced to a third party and when this new programme is implemented in the new financial year will save the outsourced cost of £22k.

Consultation on the proposed transfer of Grounds Maintenance to Qualis

The formal consultation period for Council tenants and leaseholders runs from 21 November-21 December 2022. Methods of consultation include electronic and paper flyers, a survey and on-line question and answer sessions for people living in sheltered housing, general needs housing and members of the tenant and leaseholder panel.

Residents have been informed that all responses received during the consultation period will be considered before a formal decision is made on the proposed transfer of grounds maintenance service to Qualis Group Ltd.