

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 23 July 2024

Subject: Housing and HGGT Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Nigel Bedford

Recommending:

That the report of the Housing & HGGT Portfolio Holder be noted.

1. Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT)

EFDC officers continue to liaise with key stakeholders across the five Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) authorities and relevant site promoters. This is undertaken in the context of wider Garden Town activities. Key updates in terms of the Garden Town are:

- The Harlow Gilston Garden Town Joint Committee has now been established. The first meeting of the Joint Committee was held on 11 June 2024, where the Chairman and Deputy Chairman were elected, and the HGGT 2024/25 Budget and Programme was reviewed. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 22nd July 2024.
- Work is ongoing on the HGGT 3-year business plan for the period 2025-28, setting out a proposed programme of work for 2025/26 and the objectives for 26/27 and 27/28. This will be presented to the Joint Committee in due course.
- Following public and stakeholder consultation, the Latton Priory Design Code was endorsed by Cabinet in March 2024 and sits alongside the Strategic Masterplan Framework as a material consideration in planning decisions.
- The East of Harlow Masterplanning Guidance Supplementary Planning Document was formally adopted by EFDC on 28 May 2024.
- A newly appointed EFDC HGGT lead liaison officer, Adeola Pilgrim, is now in post.
- A 1.5 FTE HGGT resource has been secured from Sustrans using multi-District UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocations for community/business engagement on sustainable travel. One full-time officer now active in post since end May, slight delay in recruitment of second part time officer.
- Sport England Place Partnership Expansion in Harlow will include a major focus on active and sustainable travel and large-scale funding opportunities via Active Essex (project activation meeting on 9th July at Harlow Rugby Club).
- Following successful use of EFDC Youth Council in LCWIP process, Harlow YC have offered an October slot for sustainable transport discussion.

2. Housing and Asset Management

Asset Management

a) Energy Efficiency Retrofit

Works to improve the energy efficiency at 132 homes is in progress. So far, retrofit works have been completed at 26 homes and two are in progress. The work is being delivered by E.ON and is part funded by the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF). The project is due to complete by April 2025.

Our approach to the remainder of our energy efficiency retrofit programme (to meet a minimum of SAP band C by 2030 and all homes ready for net zero by 2050) is to be considered by Cabinet on 15th July.

b) Major Works - The Broadway, Debden

Tenders for the proposed major works at The Broadway have been returned. Three contractors submitted prices along with quality commitments. The submissions are currently being evaluated. A report will go to Cabinet on 2nd September seeking approval to appoint the recommended contractor.

We continue to liaise with commercial tenants to ensure the works planned, will minimise impacts on their trading during this period.

A meeting with the residential leaseholders is arranged for Wednesday 3rd July to discuss the works, scale and process of recharges. A meeting with all residents has been arranged for Wednesday 24th July.

We anticipate works will start in October or November this year.

c) Major Works at Limes Farm Estate

Major works at Limes Farm Estate is complete. We are now in the 12-month defects liability period where the contractor, Equans, will be responsible for rectifying any defects in their work that arise.

d) Stock Condition Survey

During 2023, Ridge and Partners surveyed 51% of the dwellings in our housing stock and 87% of the blocks. During 2024, Ridge and Partners have been commissioned to survey the remaining stock. They started this second phase of surveys in April. Access permitting, we aim to have surveyed all our housing properties during 2024/25.

The surveys will provide us with up-to-date estimates of the remaining lives of building components (kitchens, windows, roofs etc.). This will enable us to develop a cost-effective planned replacement programme.

This will strengthen the existing data we hold and, support us in identifying and carrying out works to properties to ensure we continue to meet the Decent Homes Standard. It will also ensure we can identify cases of damp and mould that may not have already been reported and arrange for remedial works as necessary.

e) Landlord Compliance (at 1st July)

Over the 'Big Six' areas of landlord compliance (Gas Safety, Electrical Safety, Asbestos, Fire Risk Assessments, Water Hygiene, Lifts) we are at 100% for asbestos, water hygiene, lift safety and fire risk assessments.

Our teams continue to tackle instances of no-access from tenants for gas safety and, electrical safety inspections which do impact on performance at times.

We are in the process of implementing a purpose-built compliance software system, C365. This will enable our compliance management to be more robust and more efficient. We expect to start using this system to report on gas safety in the next two months. The remaining areas of landlord compliance will follow.

f) Asset Management Strategy

We have been working with Ark Consultancy on the Housing Asset Management Strategy. We are in the final stages of developing a supporting action plan for the strategy which was approved by Cabinet earlier this year.

g) A Partnering Agreement with Qualis

Qualis Property Services and EFDC have in place a service level agreement (SLA) which sets out expectations and delivery requirements. The SLA is due for review and this work is currently underway with the emphasis on this being a Partnering Agreement, and one that supports continuous improvement. We plan for the new Partnering Agreement to come into effect from April 2025.

h) Repairs and Maintenance Policy

We have been working with the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Panel and with Qualis to develop a repairs and maintenance policy. This will cover such matters as repair responsibilities, priority timescales for completing repairs, a contractor's code of conduct and the standard to be achieved for reletting a void property. We aim to have a draft policy in the autumn for consideration by Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in due course.

Housing

a) Regulatory landscape & Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM's)

An all-member briefing was issued on 14th June to members, outlining the approach and expectations of the Regulator of Social Housing. The briefing also provided members with the outcome of the TSM's survey carried out for HRA tenants. Regarding TSM's, the EFDC overall tenant satisfaction rate was 75% which is a very positive outcome. We had a very good response rate to the survey with over 1,100 residents taking part. We continue to consider the feedback with a view to improving our services further.