

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 28 April 2009

Subject: Housing Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor David Stallan

Item: 7(h)

Recommendation:

That the report of the Housing Portfolio Holder be noted.

Housing Strategy Conference

As I reported to the last Council meeting, the Council has produced a consultation draft of the Council's proposed new Housing Strategy, which identifies current and future housing needs and sets out the Council's strategic housing plans for the medium term. It has been produced, initially, as a consultation draft in order to seek comments and feedback from a wide range of stakeholders that may have an interest in the Council's future housing strategy.

In order to provide consultees with an opportunity to receive presentations on the main elements of the consultation draft, and to provide informal feedback, we held a one-day Housing Strategy Conference on 18 March 2009 in Waltham Abbey. We sent out over 150 invitations and 44 delegates attended - from housing associations, neighbouring councils, local town and parish councils, developers, architects, partner agencies and the voluntary sector. A number of district councillors also attended.

The conference was very successful and will be very helpful when producing the final Housing Strategy. A conference report is being produced, summarising the main points arising.

After the four-month consultation period, I will consider all the responses received and then propose the final version for adoption by the full Council in Spring 2009. The final version will last for a three-year period, although it will include a Key Action Plan, which will be reviewed and updated annually.

CLG Consultation Document on New Council Housing

As I reported to the last Council meeting, I received the above-named consultation document from the Government's Communities and Local Government (CLG) Department. In essence, it proposes the removal of the current disincentives for local authorities to build new social housing themselves.

In view of the importance of this matter, I have responded to the CLG on behalf of the Council. However, before so doing, I first sought the views of the Housing Scrutiny Panel at its meeting on 23 March 2009 and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation. I am grateful for members' input to the response. The outcome is awaited.

Housing Information Evening - Monday 23 March 2009

I would like to thank all members who attended the Housing Information Evening at the Civic Offices on 23 March 2009, which was part of the Members Training Programme 2008/9. The event provided members with a good opportunity to find out more about the work of the Housing Directorate and current housing issues, and to ask officers associated questions.

Members may be interested to know that a Tour of the District to visit sites of current housing interest is being arranged for all members on 15 September 2009. More details can be found in the recently published Members Training Directory 2009/10, but interested members may want to make a note in their diary now.

Supporting People Charge Increase

Supporting People is the regime whereby the County Council provides revenue funding to housing providers (such as housing associations and councils) to help with the costs of providing supported housing schemes. For sheltered housing tenants, the funding only meets the support costs of tenants in receipt of housing benefit. Tenants not in receipt of housing benefit have to pay the charge themselves. Due to late notification by the County Council of the increased supporting people charge for 2009/10 (an increase of 1%), it was necessary for the District Council to send out formal notifications to our tenants of the increase, after the provision of the standard rent increase notification. However, the letters were able to be sent before the commencement of the 2009/10 financial year.