

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 16 February 2010

Subject: Housing Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor David Stallan

Item: 6(f)

Recommending:

That the report of the Housing Portfolio Holder be noted.

Repairs Refresh Programme

Good progress continues to be made with the Repairs Refresh Programme. The statutory notice inviting expressions of interest for the appointment of the Private Repairs Management Contractor was published in early January 2010. The Repairs Advisory Group met on 27 January 2010 and agreed the Procurement Strategy, proposed by the Council's consultants Cameron Consulting, which sets out the approach to be taken to the appointment. The Advisory Group also agreed the Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) criteria and process, in order to reduce applicants to a manageable shortlist.

The next stage is for Cameron Consulting to produce a shortlist of contractors to submit detailed tenders for the contract.

Draft Regulatory Framework for Social Housing – Tenant Services Authority (TSA)

In my last report to Council, I explained that the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) had issued a statutory consultation document, which sets out the six standards that social housing providers (including the Council) will have to meet from 1 April 2010.

I am grateful to the Housing Scrutiny Panel which, at its meeting held on 21 January 2010, agreed the Council's response to the TSA. The response generally welcomed the proposals, but drew attention to some concerns in respect of some of the detailed proposals.

Rent Increase

As members will note from the report on the Council Budget, I am recommending to Council an average rent increase for Council properties of 2.4% for 2010/11. This is lower than the Government's Guideline Rent Increase of 3.1% (which is also the amount by which the Government will increase the amount we need to pay to Government in negative housing subsidy). Part of the average increase (on average, around 1.6%) is based on the Government's rent restructuring regime, and the remaining element is based on a blanket increase of around 0.8%.

An average increase of 2.4% is estimated to raise sufficient income to enable the Housing Revenue Account to break even in 2010/11.

It should also be noted that, since the Essex Supporting People Commissioning Body has decided not to increase the amount of Supporting People Grant that the Council will receive next year, the Council's Support Charge to tenants in sheltered accommodation will not be increased either.

Careline Extension

The Council's Careline Service will be relocating temporarily from its Control Centre in Parsonage Court at the beginning of February 2010 to a temporary home in another part of Parsonage Court. This is to enable the works to be undertaken to extend the Control Centre into the neighbouring building. The works are due to be completed in July/August 2010, when Careline will return to its permanent base.

Members Visit to Norway House

Members are reminded that they have been invited to visit Norway House Homeless Persons Hostel, along with members from North Weald Parish Council, at 11am on Saturday 20 February 2010. This will be a good opportunity for members to have a look around the hostel and to meet some of the residents.

Young Parent Scheme

Construction of the building for the Young Parent Scheme in Ongar to be provided by East Thames Housing Group started in October 2009, and is due for completion in early June 2010. When completed, it will provide 13 self-contained flats for young parents from the Epping Forest, Brentwood and Uttlesford Districts.

The building will also provide a play room, office, communal garden and communal lounge/kitchen. East Thames will provide one full-time and one part-time support worker

Leader Lodge, North Weald

A tender exercise has been undertaken for the sale of the former Hostel Manager's accommodation at Leader Lodge, North Weald to one of the Council's Preferred RSL Partners. This is to enable the existing building to be converted into four flats and to provide an annexe of 2 additional flats, which will all be sold on a shared ownership basis to first time buyers.

The highest tender was submitted by Moat, who will now work up the detailed design for the scheme and will apply for detailed planning permission.