

## ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet **Date:** 28 June 2011  
**Subject:** Housing **Item:** 6(e)  
**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Maggie McEwen

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### **Recommending:**

**That the report of the Housing Portfolio Holder be noted.**

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### **Official Opening of Rural Housing Scheme – School Lane, Abbess Roding**

I am pleased to report that the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, The Rt. Hon. Eric Pickles MP, officially opened another rural housing scheme in the Epping Forest District in May 2011, at School Lane, Abbess Roding.

The 6 affordable homes (rented and shared ownership) have been provided by Hastoe Housing Association, one of the Council's Preferred Housing Association Partners, through the Council's "Rural Exceptions Planning Policy". Under the Policy, the Council gives planning permission for the development of affordable housing on sites that would not normally receive planning permission, provided that the homes remain affordable in perpetuity and are only let to local people with housing need who have a close connection with the village or surrounding villages.

Hastoe Housing Association worked closely with the Parish Council and the Housing Directorate to bring the scheme to fruition. Guests at the Official Opening had the opportunity to visit the new homes and speak to the new residents, all of whom are delighted to be living in their new homes, in an area with which they have a close connection.

### **Appointment of Repairs Management Contractor - Mears**

The previous Housing Portfolio Holder kept members up to date with the progress to appoint a private repairs management contractor, for a period of up to 9 years, to manage and improve the Housing Repairs Service.

I am pleased to report that the contract with the successful tenderer, Mears, has now commenced, and the designated Housing Repairs Manager from Mears, Mike Gammack, has taken up his position at the Epping Depot and is already identifying improved ways of working.

The contract requires Mears to significantly improve the Council's performance on response and void property repairs and, in order for Mears to receive performance payments, the company must ensure that at least 98% of emergency, urgent and routine repairs are completed within 4 hours, 3 days and 2 weeks respectively, whilst maintaining 98% tenant satisfaction.

In addition, Mears has to deliver 5 key projects in the first year, including the installation of its own streamlined repairs IT system, the introduction of an appointment system for all

repairs and mobile technology for the Council's repairs workforce, and the provision of a more cost-effective supply chain for repairs materials - for the Council to benefit from the purchasing power of Mears to reduce unit costs.

Mike Gammack will be giving a presentation to members of the Housing Scrutiny Panel on 19 July 2011, explaining how Mears intend to implement the identified improvements.

The Repairs Advisory Group, comprising members, officers and representatives from the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, will be meeting quarterly to review performance and progress with the improvements.

### **Council Housing Stock – Feasibility into the Benefits of the Feed-in Tariff**

In order to meet stringent international greenhouse gas emission targets, the Government has introduced a financial incentive known as the "Feed-in Tariff" (FIT). This is a sum of money paid to a person or organisation who generates electricity from renewable sources, such a photo-voltaic (solar) panels or wind turbines.

The FIT is paid in two ways, the *Generation Tariff*, which is paid for the actual generation of electricity, and the *Export Tariff*, which is paid if the electricity is fed in to the National Grid. In addition, any electricity generated is available for use, free of charge, by the house-holder or the organisation. These outcomes are often referred to as the "Triple Benefit" of the FIT.

Once the solar panel and/or wind turbine has been installed, the Tariffs provide an income, which is funded by the Government for each unit of electricity generated and is guaranteed for a 25-year period.

In view of the potential savings that can be made to tenants' fuel bills, and the potential income to the Council from the FIT, the Director of Housing has commissioned specialist consultants to provide a report on how the Council can benefit from this opportunity, through the installation of photo voltaic panels on the roofs of Council properties.

It is envisaged that the report will be received in the near future and reported to the Housing Scrutiny Panel on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2011 for further discussion.

### **Remodelling of Jessopp Court, Waltham Abbey from a Scheme for Frail Older People to a Sheltered Housing Scheme**

Essex County Council has advised the Council that it intends to phase-out the provision of an on-site, 24-hour care service at Jessopp Court, Waltham Abbey, which has been a joint-provision for frail older people requiring more care and support than in sheltered housing since 1992.

Under the joint-working arrangements, the County Council has been responsible for providing the on-site staffing and personal care to tenants, and for responding to emergency alarm calls on a twenty-four hour basis. The District Council is responsible for the building and undertaking the landlord functions, including repairs and maintenance.

The County Council has assessed that Jessopp Court does not meet its new Extra Care Standards and that there is no scope for adapting the premises to make it fit for purpose as an Extra Care Scheme.

As a result of the County Council's decision, it will be necessary for the scheme to be re-modelled into a sheltered housing scheme, to accommodate residents with lower levels of

care and support needs in the future, and for the Council to provide a Scheme Manager at the scheme. I will be reporting to the Cabinet on this issue at its meeting 18<sup>th</sup> July 2011.

Existing residents and their families have been consulted by the County Council to explain the position, and the existing residents are currently having their current and future care needs assessed by the County Council's Adult Social Care Team.

### **Private Sector House Condition Survey**

The Housing Directorate is about to commence a Private Sector House Condition Survey to assess the condition of the 44,000 owner-occupied and privately-rented homes in the District. It is a legal requirement that local authorities keep the condition of the private sector housing stock in their district under review, in order to put suitable arrangements in place to meet their statutory responsibilities.

The Stock Condition Survey involves specialist consultants surveying 1,000 randomly-selected properties across the District.

The survey will take around 2 months to complete and, once the survey results have been analysed, officers will report the findings to the Housing Scrutiny Panel in October 2011. The results will help to determine the direction of the Council's Private Sector Renewal Strategy 2012-2015, which will be presented to the Cabinet for approval early in 2012.