

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 27 September 2011

Subject: Housing Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Maggie McEwen

Recommending:

That the report of the Housing Portfolio Holder be noted.

(a) Careline Control Centre, Loughton – Visit and Information Afternoon for Members: 2pm, Friday 30th September 2011

All members are invited to visit the Council's recently-extended and refurbished 24-hour Careline Control Centre at Parsonage Court, Loughton for an Information Afternoon on Friday 30 September 2011 at 2pm. This event has been organised solely for members, and not for outside organisations.

This will provide a good opportunity for members to join in with a small celebration of the first anniversary since the completion of Careline's extension, and to be brought up to date with the range of services offered by Careline. Members will also be given a short tour of the Control Centre, and have an opportunity to speak to Careline staff. Afternoon Tea and Pastries will be provided. The event will end at 4pm at the latest.

There are around 3,000 residents from across the District connected to Careline, including around 1,250 clients in the private sector.

If you would like to attend, please advise the Housing Manager (Older People's Services), Denise Pegler on 0208 508 8596 or dpegler@eppingforestdc.gov.uk.

(b) Student Accommodation Accreditation Scheme

Each year, around 650 students enrol at the East 15 Acting School, Loughton, which is part of the University of Essex. Many of these students require rented accommodation in the local area.

In order to help students and their parents make informed decisions about the quality of the accommodation available, I have approved the introduction of a Student Accommodation Accreditation Scheme by the Housing Directorate.

Under the Scheme, landlords that meet certain minimum standards are able to advertise their properties through the University of Essex's website; students looking for accommodation then have the assurance that, at the time of the accreditation, the advertised property meets all of the required standards.

The fees payable by landlords for the accreditation will be a single payment of between £50 and £175 (depending on the size of the property). The accreditation of the property will apply for 5 years, after which it must be re-accredited. These fees will be reviewed annually as part of the annual review of housing-related fees and charges.

(c) Tour of Housing Facilities and Sites of Interest

On 19th August 2011, I spent the day with the Director of Housing visiting a number of housing offices and other facilities, as well as sites of current housing interest.

This included visits to Epping Depot (Housing Repairs Service), Norway House Homeless Persons Hostel, The Broadway Housing Office, Limes Farm Estate Office and Careline. Other sites visited included Council-owned sites to be developed for affordable housing, a park home site (Abridge), proposed private development sites where affordable housing is to be provided, and a number of supported housing schemes managed by the Council's Housing Association Partners.

(d) Housing Strategy Key Action Plan 2011-2012

At its meeting held on 12th September 2011, the Cabinet was due to adopt the Housing Strategy's new Key Action Plan for 2011-12, following detailed consideration by the Housing Scrutiny Panel.

The Council's current Housing Strategy, which covers the three-year period 2009-2012, assesses the District's current and future housing needs, and sets out the Council's approach to meeting those needs.

The Strategy also includes a Key Action Plan, which sets out the proposed actions that will be taken by the Council each year to contribute towards the achievement of the housing objectives over the lifetime of the Housing Strategy.

The Key Action Plan is updated each year, following review by the Housing Scrutiny Panel. The Scrutiny Panel also monitors progress with the Key Action Plan on a 6-monthly basis, in accordance with its Terms of Reference.

The Housing Strategy will be completely updated during 2012, for adoption by the Cabinet and full Council around September 2012, which will cover a further three-year period.

(e) Liaison Meeting with Owners and Resident Association Representatives of Park Homes

Members will remember the high profile consultation exercise on proposed new licence conditions for park home sites at the beginning of the year, which were subsequently agreed by the Cabinet.

Before new site licences (with the new licence conditions) can be issued to park home owners, it is necessary for detailed inspections to be undertaken of each park home, on each site, in order to record contraventions of the proposed new licence conditions that will be allowed to continue (in accordance with the Cabinet's decision), and contraventions which must be remedied within a specified timescale.

Good progress is being made with these inspections, which are expected to be completed by November 2011.

In order to build upon the relationship that has been formed with park home owners and representatives of residents associations, a liaison meeting is being arranged for November 2011 in order to feedback to both owners and residents on progress with the inspections and introduction of licence conditions, and to seek their views on a couple of issues that have come to light through the inspection process.

The Housing Scrutiny Panel has asked for a progress report on the introduction of the new site licences at its meeting in January 2012, where feedback from the liaison meeting will be reported.

It is hoped that this will be the first of periodic liaison meetings that will be held with park home owners and resident association representatives to discuss matters of mutual interest.

(f) Planning for Real Exercise – Leader Lodge, North Weald

Leader Lodge, North Weald is owned by the Council and comprises two flats within extensive grounds which, until 2002, provided tied accommodation for the Manager and Deputy Manager of nearby Norway House, the Council's Homeless Persons Hostel. Subsequently, for a number of years, the flats were used as temporary accommodation for homeless families, but have been empty in recent years, and are in a poor state of repair.

Various attempts to convert and/or redevelop the building and associated land at Leader Lodge, North Weald have been unsuccessful.

At its meeting in March 2011, the Cabinet agreed a proposal from Hastoe Housing Association – one of the Council's Preferred Housing Association Partners – to undertake a "Planning for Real" Exercise with the local community, at its own cost, in order to consider options for future use of the site, and to help determine an appropriate approach for the future.

Planning for Real is an established tool for working with local communities, in order to consider options for future uses of sites, and to help determine an appropriate approach for the future. The model is usually adopted for larger areas, but in view of the inability to achieve an appropriate way forward for the site, the Cabinet felt that this approach would be good to use for Leader Lodge. Options to be explored include the retention of the existing building (with or without additional buildings), redevelopment of the site, sale of the site on the open market, or no development at all.

The first Planning for Real consultation meeting will be held on the evening of 23rd September 2011, to which local residents, businesses, ward members and representatives of North Weald Bassett Parish Council are being invited.

At least one further meeting will be held, and the outcome of the exercise will be reported to a future meeting of the Cabinet to determine the future use of the site.

(g) Housing Information Evening for Members – 21st September 2011

All members are reminded that a Housing Information Evening for Members will be held in Committee Room 1 at **7pm on Wednesday 21 September 2011**, which will provide useful information on the work of the Housing Directorate, basic housing finance and current housing issues.

If they have not already, members are asked to advise Democratic Services if they will be attending.