

# ***Report to the Council***

**Subject: Housing**

**Date: 28 June 2007**

**Portfolio Holder: Councillor D Stallan**

**Item: 7 (g)**

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## **Recommending:**

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

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## **Choice Based Lettings**

I have previously reported on the proposed introduction of a choice based lettings scheme for the allocation of Council properties, and that the Council is working as part of a Consortium to procure the delivery of the scheme with five neighbouring councils.

Good progress continues to be made and, following a tendering exercise amongst potential agencies that could deliver the service and an associated selection process, a suitable choice based lettings agency has been selected. The selected agency is an organisation called Locata, which already provides a choice based lettings service to a number of London Boroughs, as well as Harlow DC.

Contract negotiations are currently taking place, as well as discussions on the required project plan. It is hoped that the scheme will go live in Epping Forest by the end of the year. It is currently envisaged that three local authorities will go live together in the first phase, including Epping Forest.

## **Barnes Court, Ongar – Official Opening**

I was very pleased to attend, along with the Chairman of the Council and other members, the Official Opening of Barnes Court, Ongar on 5 June 2007. Barnes Court is a small development of six flats for people with learning disabilities by East Thames Housing Group, on a former difficult-to-let Council garage site. It was named after Ron Barnes OBE, a former Chairman of Council, who was also in attendance with his wife Felicitie to dedicate a garden seat for the benefit of the residents. At the event, some of the residents gave an excellent explanation of how the new development has changed their lives.

## **Masons Way - Scheme for People with Physical Disabilities**

Another supported housing scheme, this time for people with physical disabilities, is nearing completion. The scheme at Mason Way, Waltham Abbey by Ability Housing Association will provide five specially-equipped bungalows for wheelchair users on a former Council-owned wooded area. A multi-disciplinary panel is currently considering the nominations.

It is envisaged that the accommodation should be occupied in July, and an official opening is planned for around September 2007, to which all members will be invited.

## **Ethnic Monitoring of Housing Register and Allocations**

At the last meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Panel, the Annual Report on the Ethnic Monitoring of Housing Register Applicants and Housing Allocations was considered, which I thought would be of interest to all Members of the Council.

The reason for the annual review is to identify whether or not there are any indications to suggest the Council may be discriminating against any one ethnic group. The breakdown of the ethnic origin of applicants on the Housing Register at 31 March 2007 that was presented to the Scrutiny Panel explained that 78.3% of all housing applicants were White British/Irish; 6.1% were from other ethnic groups; whilst 15.6% did not state their ethnicity.

The Scrutiny Panel compared this breakdown with the ethnic origin of Housing Register applicants allocated Council accommodation in 2006/7, which established that 75.3% of all housing allocations went to White British/Irish applicants; 4.6% was allocated to applicants from other ethnic groups; with 20.1% of allocations being made to applicants who did not state their ethnicity.

Consequently, the Scrutiny Panel concluded that, generally, the proportion of accommodation allocated to people from different ethnic groups was similar to the proportion of housing applicants from different ethnic groups on the Housing Register.

I have asked the officers to provide a full copy of the report in the Council Bulletin for Members' information.

### **Charter Mark Renewal – Housing Services**

The whole of Housing Services currently holds a Charter Mark for customer service excellence in the public sector. However, the award only lasts for a three year period and expires in November 2007. An application is therefore being made for the award to be renewed for a further three-year period. The first stage is a document review, which will take place on 12 July, when the independent assessor will consider documentary evidence of Housing Services' approach to customer care.

The second stage is the full assessment, when the assessor will visit the offices and speak to staff, members and customers. This will take place on 1 & 2 August.