

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet **Date:** 20 December 2018

Subject: Housing & Property Services

Portfolio Holder: Councillor S. Stavrou

Recommending:

That the report of the Housing & Property Services Portfolio Holder be noted.

Council House-building Programme

I am pleased to be able to report that in November the Council has taken handover of five new Council homes from Phase 3 of the Council house-building programme at Centre Avenue, Epping (now named Matthews Close) and in Centre Drive. These are a mixture of 2 and 3-bed houses, which will be let to applicants on the Council's housing register.

Having previously reported that there was an ongoing issue over ground cross-contamination at the site in Stewards Green Road, Epping. I am pleased to be able to report that the soil contamination tests have now come back clear and the four houses are being prepared for handover. In addition, we expect to take handover of the site in Springfields Epping, which includes a mixture of houses and bungalows, enabling tenants to move into their new homes for Christmas.

Good progress is also being made at Burton Road, Loughton, where Mulalley, who is the appointed contractor for Phase 2, is still on target to hand-over all of the new properties, with the exception of the block affected by the fire in Block D, later in January 2019. Mulalley have been made aware that the Council will be seeking to recover the loss of rent as a result of this delay to Block D, which will be collected through Liquidated and Ascertained Damages as part of the Contract.

A contract has been tendered for the demolition of the garages making up Phases 4-6 to enable the site investigations to be completed. This means tenders are expected to be sought between February 2019 and April 2019, with works starting on site in June 2019 for the early packages.

Universal Credit

From 5th December 2018, the remaining job centres within the District migrated from legacy benefits to the Universal Credit (UC) full service. The Council already have some experience of UC as some Job Centres who serve our District, like Harlow, have been operating under the Universal Credit's Live Service for some time.

This means that all new Claimants from the 5th December 2018 will claim UC. However, Claimants currently claiming legacy benefits (which include - Income Support (IS), Jobseekers Allowance (Income Based) (JSA(IB)), Employment & Support Allowance (Income Related) (ESA(IR)), Working Tax Credit (WTC), Child Tax Credit (CTC) and Housing benefit (HB), will remain on their existing benefits until such time that their claim can migrate to UC.

At the end of September 2018, the Council enrolled as a Trusted Partner of the DWP, which gives Housing Management access to the UC's online Landlord Portal. Through this portal Officers can quickly verify our tenant's housing costs, speeding up a Claimants verification process which is a positive step, but additionally we can also ask for Managed or Alternative

Payments on behalf of tenants who may otherwise struggle to pay their rent or may have fallen behind on their rent, subject to certain conditions.

Homelessness Pods

I am also pleased to be able to report that work has now started on the Homeless Pods at Norway House. An order has been placed for the Pods to be manufactured off site, with the preparation works to form the ground slabs and incoming services starting in November. The Pods are anticipated to be ready for occupation in February 2019.

Facilities

All roofing and external redecoration works at the Museum in Waltham Abbey have now been completed to a high standard, on time and under budget. The building is now looking very impressive and most importantly, will be protected from the elements for years to come.

Planning permission has now been granted for the conversion of Building 21 at Townmead Depot, into accommodation for the Nursery Service, who will be relocating from their site in Pyrles Lane, Loughton. Preparatory works have already begun, and the aim is for as much of the construction works as possible to be completed in-house by the works unit.

External redecoration to communal walkway areas at Oakwood Hill Industrial Estate and at the shopping parade at Market Square in Waltham Abbey, have also been completed by the works unit. The lift refurbishment contract at the Limes Farm Estate is continuing well and on budget. All 9 lifts are scheduled to be completed by April 2019.

Fire detection upgrade works to parts of the main Civic Offices is now complete. The corporate PAT testing programme has begun, with portable appliances and equipment being safety inspected and tested.