

# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet **Date:** 21 February 2019

**Subject:** Housing & Property Services

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor S. Stavrou

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**Recommending:**

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

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## **Rough Sleeping**

The Government has recently made a series of announcements relating to homelessness and rough sleeping, with the aim of halving rough sleeping by 2022 and bringing rough sleeping to an end by 2027.

In December, Councils were invited by the MHCLG (Ministry for Housing and Local Government) to submit expressions of interest for funding from the £11 million Rough Sleeping Initiative Fund for 2019/20, to support their work on rough sleeping. The Housing Service has made an expression of interest and will shortly submit the Council's final bid for funding later this month. In the event of a successful bid application, it is the intention that funds will be used to assist rough sleepers accessing accommodation within the private rented sector and to support partner Agencies such as CHESS, in their work on rough sleeping.

In addition, the Housing Service is about to launch a campaign to raise the profile of rough sleeping in the District. The key aim of this campaign is to inform members of the public what to do if they are concerned about someone sleeping rough and how to make referrals to StreetLink, so that their details can be passed to CHESS. CHESS provide a valuable outreach service for notified rough sleepers that are identified by StreetLink.

During the cold weather the Housing Options Team have been prepared to engage the SWEP (Severe Weather emergency protocol). However no rough sleeper has had to be accommodated under these provisions.

## **Homelessness Pods at Norway House**

The four pods at Norway House (three for accommodation and one for storage) are due for completion on 15<sup>th</sup> March. Occupation will commence during w/c 18<sup>th</sup> March and each pod will accommodate either two single residents or up to two single parents with one young child. Careful selection will be given to the residents. A risk assessment will be undertaken and potential residents assessed over a four-week period. The process of assessing potential tenants currently in bed and breakfast will start mid-February and this will ensure that we identify suitable residents for the pods as soon as possible.

The timeline for completion of this project has slipped by three weeks primarily due to concerns about unexploded WW2 ordnance on site. Although a prior UXO report categorised the working area as of Low/Medium risk, the subsequent requirement to excavate, by hand, two metre deep foundations resulted in additional investigation time to safely complete this stage of the construction. The project parties have also spent some additional time ensuring that the complex interface of the pods, which are pre-manufactured off site, with the existing services on site is right so that the pods are seamlessly installed once delivered.

## **Housebuilding Programme**

The latest timelines for the housebuilding programme by phase are as follows;

- Phase 1 – currently approximately half way through the defects liability period of 24 months and 50% of the retention held has just been released.
- Phase 2 – nearing completion. Phased handovers expected from March to June 2019.
- Phase 3 – with the exception of the Queens Road development, all of the units in Phase 3 have been handed over – Queens Road is due for completion in Autumn 2020.
- Phase 4,5 and 6 – we are due to commence demolition of 6 sites in Loughton and Ongar in March 2019. It is expected that we will see construction commence on these sites in late Summer / early Autumn 2019.

## **Home Ownership**

On 21<sup>st</sup> July 2014 The Housing (Right to Buy) (Limit on Discount) (England) Order 2014 came into force. It provides for an annual increase to the maximum right to buy discount in line with the Consumer Prices Index as of September each year. This increase takes effect on 6<sup>th</sup> April each year.

As of 6<sup>th</sup> April 2019, the maximum Right to Buy Discount will increase for the Epping Forest District from £80,900 to £82,800. These discounts apply to applications which are served on the landlord by the tenant on or after 6<sup>TH</sup> April 2019 and will not be applied retrospectively to applications made before 6<sup>th</sup> April 2019.

## **Facilities**

The conversion of Building 21 at Townmead depot is continuing at a pace with much of the work being undertaken in-house by the trades team from Housing Repairs. The nursery service will be able to relocate to their new accommodation soon.

At North Weald airfield, the project to install a new high voltage substation has commenced. This will enable electricity to be supplied through the Council's own network to the new National Police Air Service building currently being constructed, to Essex & Herts Air Ambulance Trust and to any future development on the commercial side of the airfield.

Continuing at the airfield, internal redecoration of the control tower is almost complete and improvements are taking place in the conference suites. Specifications are also being prepared for the replacement of life expired fire alarm panels and detectors in the tower and the gatehouse.

The lift refurbishment contract at the Limes Farm Estate is continuing well and to budget. Lift number six of nine has now been commissioned and the project is due to complete in April 2019.

The corporate PAT testing programme has just finished, with portable appliances and equipment safety inspected and tested across multiple sites.

At the Civic Offices, the aging "Janus" swipe card door access system is being replaced as it is no longer supported by the manufacturer. We are installing a new system call "Sateon" which is far more user friendly and flexible than the old one and can be linked in with other EFDC databases.