

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 17 December 2019

Subject: Housing and Property Services Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor H Whitbread

Recommending:

That the report of the Housing and Property Services Portfolio Holder be noted

Executive Summary

The following report provides an update on progress in the following areas:

- The Council Housebuilding Programme
- Housing Management, Home Ownership and Housing Strategy
- Housing Options and Older People's Services
- Property Maintenance

Council House Building Programme

We have reviewed our methodology and are moving ahead with the next stage of our programme. A report will be presented to the Council Housing Building Committee to request approval for our next phase of tenders. In addition, we have employed an officer to review further build opportunities within the district, this will help to form our programme for future years. Our next phase of building will begin early in the New Year.

Housing Management and Home Ownership

We will shortly be starting our Star Survey. This is a survey which will gain feedback and information from 700 people across the district. This is an excellent opportunity to gain a real understanding of how our customers view the services we offer. Furthermore, it will enable us to develop our services around what matters most to our customers.

In January we will be restructuring our services into 3 specific areas, land and estates, income, and neighbourhoods. This will enable us to improve our services and our offer to customers.

Housing Options

EFDC, in partnership with Braintree, Chelmsford and Maldon and supported by Essex County Council, were successful in securing £180K grant for 2019/20 to implement rough sleeping initiatives in order to meet government targets to reduce rough sleeping. The grant currently funds an outreach service, delivered by CHESS, a rough sleeper coordinator and 2 x beds as an immediate 'off the streets' offer. The partnership was invited to apply for further funding for 2020/21. The partnership has collaborated and agreed on a bid submission which Essex County Council's Housing Growth specialist will be submitting that will include additional services around mental health support and dual diagnosis; an increased 'off the streets offer' and a greater emphasis on securing long

term housing solutions for clients. The outcome of our bid submission is expected early in the New Year.

Older People's Services

Our Older People's Service have teamed up with Age UK Essex to introduce an exciting new initiative, *All Things Digital*, at one of our sheltered housing schemes (Pelly Court) to help and support older people in their use of digital technology. Age UK Essex have been working with an IT company called Cognizant who provide volunteers who will help with a wide variety of questions in relation to the use of mobile phones, laptops, digital cameras, tablets and *all things digital*. Residents will have the opportunity to spend time with a volunteer on a one to one basis regarding any issue or problem they may have using any digital devices in the hall at Pelly Court. This initiative is provided free of charge and delivered in an informal environment with tea and coffee available. The first session was held on the 27th November where 9 people attended. The next session is planned for the 11th December. *All Things Digital* is open to the residents of Pelly Court as well as the local community and is operating on a drop-in basis.

Property Maintenance

The building contract to refurbish Oakwood Hill depot is progressing well with Phase 1 now complete. This phase saw the construction of a new mezzanine structure in MOT bay 4. The ground floor of this new area is a storage facility for the Housing Repairs Service and the first floor is now occupied by Fleet Management. Works are now underway in the ground and first floors of the main building. This part of the project includes the creation of a new reception area, enlarged offices and meeting room facilities. These will be shared by teams from Housing Repairs, Housing Assets and Grounds Maintenance. The construction of a new external storage building is also due to commence soon which will have a Sedum green roof.

Adjacent to the depot are our industrial units which are commercially let, the Operational Assets team is currently replacing aging rainwater goods to the roof of the two-storey block. Nearby at The Broadway shops in Loughton, some other roofing work is being carried out at a couple of shop premises where there are landlord's repairing liabilities.

Across several of our commercial and operational premises the foul and surface water drainage systems are being jetted as part of a regular preventative programme of planned maintenance. The fire station at North Weald Airfield, known as Building 240, is in the process of a full redecoration internally and externally.

Finally, the Housing Assets and Housing Strategy teams are working closely together to produce Fire Safety Leaflets for our tenants. This information will soon be ready for distribution and will offer advice on how to stay safe and what to do in the event of a fire.