

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

25 JUNE 2015

COUNCILLOR ADRIAN LAWRENCE - CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND COMMUNITY

For the period May to 15 June 2015

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

Housing Register

The total on the register prior to the change of policy on 1st October 2014 was 2,494 and at the end of May 2015 was 2,264 a drop of 230.

72 applicants were housed during May into Housing Association accommodation.

23 new applicants were not admitted to the register during May as they did not meet the local connection criteria. 2 were denied access because they were over the income bar.

122 new applicants were accepted onto the register during May.

Bringing Empty Homes back in to use

The Council's strategy to bring empty homes back into use has seen a property in Gayton Road, King's Lynn, being used to positively change the lives of people in housing difficulty in the town. The property that has been previously occupied by squatters, and considered an eyesore has been now been acquired and renovated by Freebridge Community Housing. The scheme to bring back empty properties into use is a partnership between the Council and Freebridge, with funding secured from the Homes and Communities Agency. The property was earmarked for a project run by the Purfleet Trust to provide support and employment training to people who have had housing difficulties. The project is now up and running and making a difference to the vulnerable people it supports.

Positive news on affordable housing

The year 14/15 ending in April saw the completion of 60 new affordable homes/ conversions in the Borough and 13 previously empty homes brought back into use as affordable homes. This was significant improvement on the previous year where delivery was 27 new affordable homes in total.

Already this year 15 new 1, 2, 3, and 4 bedroom properties have been completed at Birdbeck Drive, Outwell. The development completed by Hastoe housing association provides 'passivhaus' accommodation of high quality.

The heating costs / running costs of these homes will be exceptionally low. Hastoe also held an opening ceremony for 5 affordable homes in Burnham Overy Staithe on the 9th June, also completed to very high

environmental standards.

Spending financial contributions received for affordable housing

Following Cabinets decision to levy financial contributions on sites of 6-10 dwellings in the Borough since the introduction of the National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) threshold changes, a report on how the sums received from developments could be spent is expected to come forward for Cabinet consideration in the near future. Whilst this money is required to be spent only on affordable housing there are options on how this could be done. The report will set out the options involved.

Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)

Since publication of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) in June 2014 a new set of household and population projections were released by ONS. In assessing housing need in the Borough national planning policy stipulates that needs assessments should take account of the most recent household and population projections. A report titled 'Assessing King's Lynn and West Norfolk's Housing Requirement May 2015' which considers the most recent population projections has been completed and is now available to view on both the planning and housing pages of the Councils website.

Food Hygiene

The food team are well under way with the free allergen training for businesses which is being well received.

The focus of the next twelve months in the food team is to work with businesses scoring 0-2 in the food hygiene rating scheme to help improve their score. Overall 95% of food businesses included within the scheme have a rating of 3, 4 or 5.

Licensing

The licensing team are consulting on a proposed service level agreement for taxi testing stations. Interests will be invited from all current testing stations and those currently on the waiting list to apply for the status of an approved station.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

Changes to standards required in private rented housing

Towards the end of the last Parliament and number of legislative changes have introduced measures to improve the private rented sector and tackle bad practice. The changes include:-

- Letting Agent Transparency – agents need to publish fees, state whether they are part of a client money protection scheme and which redress scheme they have joined

- Smoke and CO Alarms - Subject to Parliamentary approval, private rented sector landlords will be required to have working smoke alarms on every floor of their property and carbon monoxide alarms in rooms where a solid fuel heating system is installed
- Retaliatory Eviction - Tenants in the private rented sector will be protected from being evicted by their landlord simply because they have made a legitimate complaint about the condition of the property

The Council has a key role in communicating these new requirements to landlords and letting agents. The private rented sector has grown in this area as it has across the country, and it is important that the Council continues to engage positively with the sector. A Landlord's forum is planned for September – further details will be posted on the website soon.

3 Meetings Attended

Full Council, Cabinet sifting, IT Training
Cabinet, Licensing Training
R&P, Various meetings with officers