

Consultation on the Housing Revenue Account

The draft HRA Budget report was presented to the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 31 January 2019. Comments from this meeting are reported in an appendix to the General Fund budget reports. Consultation with the Tenant Investment Panel (TIP) over the Investment Plan occurred during the autumn of 2018, with full tenant approval of all project lines.

The Budget and Investment Plan were approved at a joint meeting of the Way Forward Panel, Supported Involved Residents Forum (SIRF) and TIP on 10 January 2019. Tenants were broadly in agreement with all the recommendations, going on to suggest that there is a definite need for more affordable housing (in particular for rent), of all dwelling types, and also for rehabilitation places, commenting further that people with mental health do not have sufficient facilities to use. They stressed the importance of creating infrastructure to support new housing, building a proportion of homes that would be “disabled friendly”, and that all the towns in the southern part of the Council area require new social housing. Tenants were curious to know if decisions had been made on the tenancy types of the estimated figure of 70 new properties per annum, ie the split between general needs and supported accommodation. At this early stage those decisions have yet to be made, but will occur on a site by site basis. There was a further concern that modern developments tend to have smaller rooms, so tenants were keen to see above average room sizes used in new Council dwellings. They were also keen to stress the importance of sufficient parking provision at new developments.

The lack of development locally in Dunstable as part of the Local Plan was identified. The Way Forward Panel were keen to ensure we continue to invest in existing stock as well as review our existing stock and consider options for homes that are inefficient to heat or hard to let. SIRF were very keen for the Houghton Regis Central scheme to progress as soon as possible. There was a strong consensus that investment must be maintained in existing properties to maintain them to a good standard.

In relation to the HRA’s Stock Protection Capital programme, the low level of funding for drainage and fire safety was queried. For door replacement, there was a specific concern over insulating strips being missing, which could cause a security issue. Also, it was felt that the garage size/standard has not improved so there was a view expressed that money is being wasted in the Garage Refurbishment programme.

It was proposed that the Council could create a lending scheme for younger residents to assist them to purchase a home on the open market as part of the “Help to Buy” scheme, with the Council providing some or all of the additional 5% deposit that is needed (repayable upon sale of the property). Council officers will investigate to see if we are legally allowed to do this. It was proposed that schemes could be set up for Council tenants and residents, with separate budgets set aside for HRA and General Fund residents. Should the Council progress with such a scheme, consideration would need to be given as to how this would be funded.

In terms of Fees & charges, it was suggested that the Priory View guest room cost per night rate is too high, and the cost should be reduced to reflect the fact that

relatives are visiting residents where they live, and not staying in a hotel. It was felt that there is an excessive disparity between charges at this site, and the charges for guest rooms in Council sheltered schemes. If the charge was reduced residents feel that these rooms will be let more often and generate more income than they currently achieve.

The queries and proposals raised above will be reviewed and further interactive discussions with tenants will occur over coming months.