

**COMMUNITY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30pm on 8 JUNE 2006**

Present:- Councillor D J Morson – Chairman.
Councillors H D Baker, P Boland, M A Hibbs, A Marchant,
J E Menell, M J Miller and G Sell.

Also present:- Councillor M L Foley.

Tenant Forum Representatives:- D Cornell and P Simpson.

Officers in attendance:- G Bradley, R Chamberlain, S Clarke, W Cockerell,
M Cox, R Goodey, L Petrie and J Snares.

C1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C A Bayley,
M A Gayler, E W Hicks, R M Lemon, J P Murphy and F E Silver.

Councillor J E Menell declared a personal interest as a non Executive Director
of the Uttlesford PCT.

C2 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2006 were received, confirmed
and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

C3 BUSINESS ARISING

**(i) CM17 (iii) – Great Dunmow Primary School – Eastern Boundary
Housing Land**

The Executive Manager (Housing Services) advised the Committee that this
matter was still being considered by the East Area Panel and further
negotiations were continuing with the County Council.

**(ii) Minute CM18 – PCT – Strategic Health Authority and Ambulance
Trust Reconfiguration**

It was reported that the Government had opted for Option 4 for the
reconfiguration of the PCTs within Essex. That meant that Uttlesford would
be within the West Essex area with Harlow and Epping Forest. The new
arrangements would come into force from 1 October 2006. The Council had
written to the Government expressing concern that Uttlesford would be
disadvantaged by these new arrangements. Progress would continue to be
monitored.

(iii) Minute CM19 – Grant Making Decisions

The Committee was advised that each Area Panel had been allocated a sum of £8,000 for grant making decisions and this would be discussed at the Area Panels' meetings in September.

(iv) Minute CM24 – Thaxted Day Centre

It was reported that the Thaxted Day Centre Project would commence once the Vicarage Mead Sheltered housing refurbishment had been completed at the end of the year.

C4

CHOICE BASED LETTINGS

The Committee was advised of the progress being made with the Choice Based Lettings Consortium bid. Choice Based Lettings was a new Government approach to the letting of social housing. It aimed to make letting arrangements more transparent and to make it easier for tenants and residents to apply for housing with the Council or with registered social landlords. It was Government policy that all stock owning social housing landlords should have a scheme and it was providing four million pounds over three years to support and develop these schemes.

At the former Health and Housing Committee in September 2005, it had been agreed that Uttlesford should be part of a sub regional bid on the understanding that any final decision on the scheme would be made by the Committee. A scheme had been formalised with Epping Forest, Broxbourne, East Herts and Chelmsford Councils. Each authority would still do their own allocations and the partnership working would be around a joint computer system in each local authority office and a joint website and advertising the properties available across the area.

The bid had been successful and the partnership had been awarded £96,000 to implement choice based letting within the six authority areas. The funding would help with set up costs, the computer system and a project officer to help implement the scheme in each area. This would enable Uttlesford to move forward with a scheme, ahead of the Government target and without short term strain on staff resources.

Officers still had some concerns about the scheme and how it would impact on a rural area, the effect on the void rate and to ensure that minority groups and the less advantaged were protected. It was suggest that work should commence on implementing the scheme, with the help of the Consortium consultant, but before a final decision was made a further report would be submitted to Committee. The Committee was informed that if, at some future date, it was decided not to proceed there could be financial penalties involved

Daphne Cornell, Tenant Panel representative, said that the recent Panel meeting had given the scheme a cautious welcome. However, it could not escape the fact that there wasn't sufficient affordable housing in Uttlesford to give those in need a choice of a home. There was also concern about ongoing revenue costs and the effect on void rates.

Members welcomed this scheme as it appeared to be customer focused. There was concern at the use of consultants but members were advised that their use in this case was required by and paid for by the Government.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the position regarding the Choice Based Letting Scheme Consortium bid in the district and authorises officers to work with consultants on the implementation of the scheme and report back to a future meeting of the Committee.

C5

SMOKE DETECTORS IN COUNCIL DWELLINGS

The Property Services Manager presented a report that had been requested by Members following concerns about a fire that had taken place in a Council dwelling in Takeley. It was currently Council policy that all the Council's sheltered and elderly person accommodation should have both mains and battery operator smoke detectors. It was also estimated that 85% of tenants in general needs accommodation had battery detectors fitted.

The cost of installing mains operator smoke alarms across the whole housing stock would be £100,000 plus ongoing regular maintenance costs of £17,000. Any cost would impact on the Council's planned maintenance programme and achieving the Decent Homes standard by next year. It was however suggested that this might be a good time for the Council to consider whether this facility should be provided and consider placing the works in the programme from 2007 onwards.

It was also suggested that until a decision was made, fire angel/lithium smoke detectors should be automatically provided at all general needs new lettings. Members commented that if the Council was serious about the provision of detectors they should be mains operated due to the fallibility of the battery type alarms. In order to reduce cost, Members suggested that if any rewiring was currently going ahead the smoke detectors should be installed in those properties. Some Members considered the provision of alarms to be the individuals' responsibility. Views were also expressed that the provision of mains smoke alarms would be a real improvement to Council properties and improve security for Council tenants.

RESOLVED that

- 1 officers highlight the horror of fire and the Council's policy on the provision of smoke detectors in the next newsletter to tenants
- 2 officers carry out an assessment of the impact of the provision of mains operated smoke detectors being installed into all general needs housing on the planned maintenance programme from 2007/08 onwards.
- 3 fire angel/lithium smoke detectors be automatically provided at all general needs lettings.
- 4 mains smoke detectors be included in any properties in the rewiring programme.

C6 MUSEUM SERVICE ACCESS POLICY

The Museum was required to provide an access policy for the Heritage Lottery Fund and it was desirable for the Government's accreditation scheme for museums. The policy described the Museum's facilities and policy for providing physical and intellectual access to all, barriers which remain and steps being taken to address them.

Councillor Boland suggested that the public would have better access to the Museum website if it was further developed as an independent site with its own domain name.

RESOLVED that the Museum service access policy statement 2006-11 be approved.

C7 MUSEUM SERVICE FORWARD PLAN 2006-12

The Museum Curator explained that a forward plan was required for the Government's accreditation scheme for Museums and for future application to the Heritage Fund. The forward plan outlined the present position and future developments of the Museum service within sustainable limits, and identified projects for further appraisal. She stressed that approval of this plan did not commit the Council to any specific scheme or expenditure at this stage.

Councillor Sell said that this was a very exciting time for the Museum with the Heritage Quest Centre and the proposed extension of the Museum. Some Members expressed reservations about transferring the TIC to the Museum site. The Committee made some suggestions regarding greater advertising of the Museum, within the library and displaying posters at railway stations.

The Chairman thanked the Museum Curator for the immense amount of work that had gone into preparing this plan.

RESOLVED that the Museum Service Forward Plan be approved as a basis for further investigation and improvement of the service.

C8 TENANT FORUM MINUTES

The Committee received the Minutes of the Tenants Forum held on 13 March 2006.

Councillor Hibbs thanked those tenants that had been part of the Homelessness Task Group and for the valuable contribution they had made to the discussion. It was also suggested that the tenants' newsletter should be used to publicise the Area Panel meetings.

C9 FIRST AID

At the meeting on 26 January 2006 the Committee had considered a notice of motion from Councillor Gregory to consider the placement of a defibrillator in

the Council's main offices. The Principal Environmental Health Officer had since contacted Essex ambulance who had offered to train volunteer members of staff to become first responders and to provide and maintain the necessary equipment. The first responders were despatched to the scene of life threatening medical calls at the same time as ambulance crews but as they were often in more rural areas they might be the first to arrive on the scene. Currently the ambulance service was looking for daytime volunteers in the Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow and Thaxted areas.

Members asked whether this scheme could also apply to Councillors. It was suggested that Councillors could be involved in the training although there would be the question of where the necessary defibrillator equipment would be sited. Councillor Miller said it would be a good idea for Councillors to start up centres in their own villages where such a provision would be particularly useful.

RESOLVED that the Committee give its support to the scheme and actively encourage staff to volunteer for the appropriate training.

C10 HOMELESSNESS STATISTICS 2005/06

The Committee received the homelessness figures for the period 1 April to 31 March 2006. It was noted that the figures for this year had gone down. This appeared largely due to the appointment of a dedicated homelessness officer who was able to be more proactive and deal with problems of homelessness in a different way.

C11 HOMELESS ACCOMMODATION

The Senior Housing Officer (Homelessness) presented a report which outlined the work that had been completed by the Homelessness Task Group. The Task Group had been set up to look at the current provision of homeless accommodation within Uttlesford and to consider what future provision might be required by the authority if it was to continue to meet its statutory duties. The Task Group had assessed the current situation and found that families and young people had been spending considerable amounts of time in bed and breakfast accommodation which was against current legislation, it was expensive and not acceptable for the people concerned. It was clear that the Council should be working with other groups and charitable organisation to address the needs of the young homeless.

The report set out the targets that the Task Group felt the Council should be aiming for in respect of homeless accommodation and various options that could be considered.

Councillor Boland asked if he could be given details of the current expenditure on homeless cases compared to the new proposals. The Executive Manager (Housing Services) stated this would be covered in a report hopefully at the September meeting of the committee..

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Committee recognises the work of the Homelessness Task Group and noted that there was a proven need for more appropriate accommodation to be provided by the Council.
- 2 officers be authorised to investigate and report back with proposals on how this Council could provide suitable accommodation with the aim of ending the use of bed and breakfast accommodation at the earliest opportunity.
- 3 the work carried out with other agencies be noted and officers be authorised to continue this approach in order to endeavour to provide suitable short term accommodation.
- 4 It be noted that the work of the Task Group was now complete.

C12 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2006/07

The Committee received details of known issues that would be submitted to the Committee for decision meetings at which Members could expect the reports. Members asked that the following matters be considered:

Report on private sector housing surveys
Decent Homes plus
Customer satisfaction issues at the Leisure Centre

C13 THAXTED YOUTH CLUB – REQUEST FOR A CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS NEW BUILDING

The Committee was informed that Thaxted Youth Club had embarked on a project to build a youth centre at an approximate cost of £150,000. The Council had been asked to make a contribution towards this development. The youth club provided activities for 25-35 young people from Thaxted and the surrounding parishes on three evenings per week. It has been running for many years and provided a much needed provision for local young people. The building used was in very poor condition and considered to be beyond economic repair. A decision had been taken to demolish the existing building and construct a new one as there were no suitable alternative premises available in Thaxted. If a new building was not provided the club would have to close within the next two years.

The project was likely to cost in the region of £150,000. To date £47,000 had been raised and it was understood that £50,000 had been secured from another fund. The Council had been asked to contribute to the shortfall of approximately £52,000.

Councillor Foley attended the meeting and spoke in support of the request. He said that the youth club was funded by the parents of the children and was of real benefit to the rural community. A tremendous amount of effort had already been made in raising funds but if the shortfall could not be found the

youth club would be forced to close. The Committee agreed that this was a worthy project but expressed some concern that there was no funding forthcoming from Essex County Council Youth service.

Members asked that a fully costed business plan be provided so that the scheme could be properly assessed by the Operations Committee. Councillor Menell also suggested that as there might be other similar requests coming to the Council, a criteria should be devised by which all future applications could be judged.

RECOMMENDED to the Operations Committee that the Committee support in principle the contribution as requested in the report subject to a full business plan being submitted.

It was further RESOLVED that officers devise criteria by which future applications could be judged.

C14

INTERIM FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TOWARDS CONTINUED PROVISION OF POST REQUEST BY PRIMARY CARE TRUST

The Chairman agreed to the consideration of this item on the grounds of urgency as a decision was required before the next meeting of the Committee.

The Committee was advised that the Chief Executive of the Uttlesford Primary Care Trust had approached the District Council's Chief Executive to request interim financial assistance towards continued provision of a post after the funding for the Uttlesford PCT ceased on 31 July 2006. For the past year the PCT had employed a sexual health worker who gave help and advice to young people on maintaining their sexual health and avoiding teenage pregnancies. The cost of the post was £9,757 in 2004-05 at 18 hours a week. Funding for two years had been secured as a one off payment from teenage pregnancy outreach in rural areas. Further funding was currently being explored but to date had not been identified.

The District Council had been asked to consider interim funding for the post until external money could be secured or until the new PCT arrangements were established in October.

The Chief Executive asked the Committee to consider the principle of this request as the Council had not agreed with the PCT reorganisation and the resulting difficulties were not of the Council's making. Members agreed with this sentiment but were keen for this important post to continue. The Committee agreed to the funding, provided it was only for the three month interim period.

RECOMMENDED that the Committee agree the interim funding identified and that delegated powers be passed to officers in conjunction with the Chairman of the Community Committee to work with the Primary Health Trust to investigate future funding and maintain the Sexual Health Workers Post in the interim.