

Committee:	COMMUNITY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item
Date:	January 24, 2008	4
Title:	LEAD OFFICER'S REPORT	
Author:	Diane Burridge, Director of Operations, 01799 510580	Item for decision

Summary

1. This report updates Members on matters arising from the minutes that are not otherwise on this Agenda and proposes a performance indicator for Housing that will go forward to Performance Select.

Recommendations

2. That the report is noted.
3. That the corporate indicator for housing which measures % of surplus Council land used for affordable housing (at point 11) is approved.

Background Papers

3. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report.
 - Minutes of Community Committee 1 November 2007.
 - Area Plan Decision Booklet, Post Office Ltd.
 - Council Meeting 11 December 2007/Corporate Plan.

Situation/Update

There are updates from the November 2007 meeting followed by items for information.

4 Saffron Walden Skate Park/Turpin's Indoor Bowls Club

A meeting was held in December attended by Councillor J Ketteridge, Malcolm White, Saffron Walden Town Council, Sue Locke, Projects/Access Officer, Gaynor Bradley, Leisure & Community Development Manager and two representatives of Turpin's, Pauline Tinnelly, Secretary and Roy Tinnelly, Board Member. It was agreed that the installation of a barrier should be further investigated and that the Turpin's representatives would raise the matter at their next Board meeting in January. Saffron Walden Town Council have been asked to approve expenditure for the barrier identified by the Town Clerk. All parties involved will be meeting again on Wednesday 30 January 2008 to progress the matter.

5 Post Office Closures

At the last meeting, Community Committee heard of the proposed closure of four Post Offices in Uttlesford, and responded to the consultation through the Lead Officer. The final decisions on each of the four Uttlesford post offices have been published and are set out below. 47 of the 51 proposed closures for East Essex and Suffolk will go ahead but to meet requirements set out by Government three additional Post Offices are proposed for closure one of those is located in our district at Henham.

[Following extract taken from Post Office Network Change Programme, Area Decision Booklet, East Essex and Suffolk]

Little Hallingbury

The concerns raised during the local public consultation highlighted the affect on the elderly and disabled population, difficult and limited car parking at the alternative branches. They also mentioned the infrequent public transport, especially on the return journey. There were concerns that the closure would affect the community and their social life and respondents also wanted to highlight the helpful and efficient service provided at the branch.

We have reviewed all the factors relating to this proposal. There are 9 branches within 3 miles of this branch with the nearest is less than 2 miles away. Public transport is available with a regular bus service to Hatfield Heath. Car ownership in the area is high. There is also adequate parking available for those who chose to drive or are driven to the Post Office® Hatfield Heath branch. Taking these and other factors into consideration Post Office Ltd's final decision is to proceed with the closure of Post Office ® Little Hallingbury branch.

Mole Hill Green

Minimal feedback was received in relation to this branch.

Post Office Ltd has conducted a full review of the proposal regarding this branch. After taking all relevant factors into consideration, the final decision is to proceed with the closure of the Post Office ® Molehill Green branch.

Quendon

During the local public consultation period, customers were mainly concerned for the effect our proposal would have on the elderly and customers with disabilities.

However usage of this branch was extremely low. Taking this into account and after re-examining all other relevant factors relating to this proposal, the final decision is to proceed with the closure of Post Office ® Quendon branch.

Rowntree Way, Saffron Walden

The main concerns raised during the local public consultation related to the alternative branches which customers said were too far away, had limited car

parking and already experienced long queues. Customers felt the elderly would suffer by having to travel the extra distance to the alternative branches.

All the factors in this case have been reviewed. We have found that there is a high proportion of car ownership in the area and adequate and regular, public transport available. The journey time is approximately 12-15 minutes to Saffron Walden, which is 0.8 miles away. We also looked at the ability of other branches to cope with additional customers and found it to be sufficient to maintain good levels of customer service. As a matter of course, we will continue to review service levels on an ongoing basis. Taking these and all other factors into consideration, our final decision is to close Post Office ® Rowntree way branch.

Proposed changes to the Area Plan Proposal as a result of local public consultation

In implementing the Programme across the UK, Post Office Ltd must meet the requirements set out by the Government which include:

- The compulsory compensated closure of up to 2500 branches.
- The introduction of about 500 Outreach service points.
- Compliance with the minimum access criteria.
- That the population of any one area, any one country in the UK or any group of people is not overall significantly more adversely affected by the Programme than the population of any other area, country or group of people (as appropriate).
- That there should be a broadly similar number of compulsory compensated branch closures pursuant to the programme in rural areas as in urban areas (including deprived urban areas across the UK as a whole).
- That there should be a broadly similar number of compulsory compensated branch closures pursuant to the Programme in any one country as in the whole of the UK.

As indicated previously, Post office Ltd has decided not to proceed with the closure of the Fore Street, Honeycroft Lawford and Warley Road branches. Following a further review of the area Post Office Ltd is now proposing that the following branches should be closed instead:

- **Post Office® Henham** Stores branch, High Street, Henham, Bishop's Stortford CM22 6AS
- Post Office® Little Bentley branch, Bentley Manor Barns, Church Road, Little Bentley, Essex CO7 8SE
- Post Office® Kersey branch, 4 Vale Lane, Kersey, Ipswich IP7 6EH

A six week period of local public consultation closes on 14 February in relation to the proposed closure of these alternative branches.

6 Housing Staff Vacancies

Members requested an update of vacancies in Housing Management, some posts are currently subject to reconfiguration and vacant posts will be made available for application by redeployed employees.

VACANCIES - HOUSING (as at 17/1/07)						
Title	Full / Part Time	Salary Code	Days Worked if Part Time	Grade	FTE %	Contract Hours per week
Tenant Participation Officer	P	S613	W Th	5	40.50	15.00
Allocations Officer	P	S635	Th F	4	39.20	14.50
Housing Rents Assistant	P	S642	N Tue	6	40.50	15.00
RTB Leasehold Officer	P	S623	M Tue W	6	60.80	22.50
Clerical Assistant (Programming)	P	S622	Th F	3	39.20	14.50
Clerical Assistant (Housing)	F	S636		3	100.00	37.00
Elderly Persons Officer	F	S680		6	100.00	37.00
Sheltered Housing Officer	F	S696		4	100.00	37.00
Senior Architectural Surveyor	F	S656		PO 5-8	100.00	37.00
Electrical Mechanical Surveyor	F	S678		PO 1-4	100.00	37.00
Repairs Surveyor	F	S663		SO 1	100.00	37.00
Technical Repairs Administrator	F	S667		4	100.00	37.00
Plumber apprentice	F	W226		5	100.00	37.00
Plumber Level 2	F	W248		5	100.00	37.00
Plumber Level 1	F	W242		6	100.00	37.00
15 Posts - FTE:					12.20	

7 Dog Control Orders

The Dog Control Orders have now been made incorporating a number of last minute additions and will come in to force on 1st April 2008. Arrangements are being made to publicise the Orders as required by the legislation and to fixing signs at the individual sites.

8 Lebanese Report

Members asked for comparison data on the costs of responding to the evacuation of Lebanon. Of the five other Authorities involved, two have provided data as follows.

Lebanon Evacuation Local Authority Response Comparison

Responding Agency	Lead agency for responding to the evacuation?	Total number of evacuees received	Out of how many did you accommodate in the first phase?	Accommodate any of the evacuees in Council housing/housing association	Initial cost	Final Cost
Leicester County Council	Leicester County Council	195	102	34	N/A	£54,000+
Uttlesford District Council	Uttlesford District Council	601	98 + 15 for immediate	30	N/A	£84,649.99

			help with onward travel			
Crawley Borough Council	West Sussex County Council	2,500	18	None	£3,786	£3,786

Further to the above Members asked that they be provided with an update on housing of the evacuees.

Lebanese assisted by UDC since July 2006

xxxxx – Went from Hilton to relatives in London

xxxxx – Went from Colchester to relatives in Manchester

xxxxx – Permanently housed in Stansted by Springboard HA has since done exchange to London

xxxxx – Permanently housed in Newport by UDC

xxxxx – Permanently housed in Bishops Stortford via Stansted Area Partnership

xxxxx – Went from Colchester to relatives in Newcastle

xxxxx – Housed in private accommodation in Saffron Walden

xxxxx – Permanently housed by South Cambs

xxxxx – Permanently housed by Swan HA in Saffron Walden

xxxxx – Remains in UDC temporary accommodation in Stansted

xxxxx – Remains in UDC temporary accommodation in Saffron Walden

xxxxx – Permanently housed in Dunmow by UDC

xxxxx – Now housed by Westminster Council following UDC referral

xxxxx - Now housed by Westminster Council following UDC referral

xxxxx – Returned to Lebanon

xxxxx - Remains in UDC temporary accommodation in Stansted

xxxxx – Permanently housed in Radwinter by UDC

xxxxx – Returned to Lebanon

xxxxx - Returned to Lebanon

xxxxx – Abandoned temporary accommodation in Leaden Roding, whereabouts unknown

xxxxx - Remains in UDC temporary accommodation in Stansted

9 Negative Subsidy

The DCLG has now responded to our letter requesting a meeting with Yvette Cooper to discuss the negative housing subsidy. Unfortunately the Government Minister does not think that a meeting at this time would be fruitful as the Government has recently announced that a review of the HRA subsidy system is due to be carried out shortly. The aim of the review is to ensure that the Government have a sustainable long term system for financing council housing. The Council has already responded to consultation documents regarding this review.

Letter to the Government regarding the negative subsidy arrangements imposed on local authorities

Yvette Cooper
Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU

Your ref:

Our ref:

Dear

NEGATIVE SUBSIDY HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT

I am writing with reference to the issues surrounding the 'negative subsidy' arrangements imposed on Local Authorities.

Uttlesford District Council is a negative subsidy authority and under the current mechanisms will be returning £4.4 million to the Government in 2007/08. This costs every one of our tenants £29 per week each. For some time now members of the Council's Tenant Forum have expressed their unhappiness at the need to pay such substantial amounts of negative housing subsidy. They feel that this money should be used to help with local issues relating to the housing stock. This is view supported by officers and Members of the Community Committee.

I understand that reforms were intended to ensure fairer social sector rents, and that this is one of the main drivers of the subsidy calculation. However, I would be grateful if a meeting could be arranged with a view to discussing how the system can be improved in such a way that it reduces the extremes whereby authorities such as Uttlesford are obliged to contribute so much of their rental income. I will be accompanied by a Member of the Community Committee and the Tenant Forum.

I would like to thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely



Alasdair Bovaird
Chief Executive
Uttlesford District Council
Council Offices
London Road
Saffron Walden
Essex
CB11 4ER



cc D Burridge
R. de Burridge
A Webb
The Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP
Minister for Housing and Planning

Department for Communities and Local
Government
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www.communities.gov.uk

Our Ref: YC/033493/07
Your Ref: AB/RM/EDB

20 DEC 2007

NEGATIVE SUBSIDY

Thank you for your letter of 1 November concerning the issue of negative subsidy arrangements under the housing revenue account subsidy regime. Please accept my apologies for the delay in replying; as you will no doubt be aware, we have been extremely busy over the past few months working on the comprehensive spending review and related business.

The issue of negative subsidy is certainly a vexed one; it is always difficult to explain to tenants why a portion of their rents is used to cover the costs of local authority housing other than their own. Nonetheless, as the system stands, this redistribution is an essential component of the mechanism. It may be unpopular, but no-one has yet been able to suggest an alternative system that would not cost the general taxpayer and council tenants considerably more than they currently pay merely to maintain the status quo.

The Housing Revenue Account Subsidy system performs a very specific purpose as noted above. You will be aware that we are exploring other options to address the wider problem of housing need and to this end we recently published a number of proposals for consultation in our Green Paper, *Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable*. In that document we review the progress made since 1997 and explore the challenges we continue to face, including the need for more new homes to meet growing demand; well-designed and greener homes, linked to good schools, transport and healthcare; and more affordable homes to buy or to rent.

I have recently announced a review of the HRA subsidy regime. The aim of the review is to ensure that we have a sustainable long-term system for financing council housing and that then system is consistent with wider housing policy.

There is a great deal happening that concerns local authority housing at the moment, but much of the work is in a very early stage of development and I do not think that a meeting at this time would be fruitful.

Yours Sincerely

YVETTE COOPER

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Yvette Cooper", with a small "PP." written below it.

10 Tenants Elections

The newly elected (uncontested) Tenant Forum consists of 12 tenants plus one leaseholder. The new forum will take up its post in February and its makeup is representative of a range of tenancies. Since the close of nominations, a few more tenants have shown an interest therefore they have all been invited to attend the meeting. (All tenants are welcome but have no voting power). When a place becomes vacant one of the interested tenants can then be co-opted on to the forum.

The following is a new item for Member decision

11 Use of Surplus Council Land for Affordable Housing

At the Council meeting of 11 December 2007 members approved the Corporate Plan 2007-09 and in addition resolved that the responsible committees be requested to determine the measurement and targets of the associated corporate indicators for approval by the Performance Select Committee, with monitoring commencing in April 2008. The following Housing Corporate Indicator, along with its associated calculation and proposed target is therefore presented for discussion and agreement'.

INDICATOR	CALCULATION	REPORTING FREQUENCY	TARGET FOR 2008/2009
% of surplus Council land used for affordable housing	$\frac{X}{Y} * 100$ <p>Where,</p> <p>X = Area of land transferred to a Registered Social Landlord in the period</p> <p>Y = Total area of land disposed of in the period</p>	Quarterly	100% (in any period where land disposal occurred)