

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 – COMMUNITY AND HOUSING held at the COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 16 JANUARY 2002

Present:- Councillor D J Morson – Chairman.
Councillors A Dean, Mrs C D Down, M A Gayler, D M Jones, R A Merrion, R J O'Neill, Mrs S V Schneider, Mrs E Tealby-Watson and P A Wilcock.

Officers in attendance:- Mrs M Cox, Mrs S McLagan and M T Purkiss.

S1.22 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor R C Smith.

S1.23 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2001 were agreed and signed as a correct record, subject to the substitution of the word 'fora' for the words 'for a' in Minute S1.9 - Community Health Council and Primary Care Trust

S1.24 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute S1.9 – Meeting with representatives of the Community Health Council and Primary Care Trust

The Chairman stressed the importance of the Council being actively involved in the Patients' Forum.

(ii) Minute S1.11 – Health and Housing Committee

Councillor A Dean expressed concern at the reference to his raising questions about the Health and Housing Budget and asked that in future the subject matter of such questions be minuted.

S1.25 WORK PROGRAMME

Members discussed future issues that could be considered by the Committee and felt that for the next few meetings it should continue to pursue those areas that had already been identified.

S1.26 PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY

The Committee received the notes of the meeting of the Stort Valley Forum that had been held at Elsenham School on 29 November 2001 and had discussed matters relating to public rights of way. There had been a useful discussion on a number of areas, including promoting footpaths for leisure,

footpath signage and clearance and also a detailed discussion of a local problem.

Councillor A Dean had suggested that action could be taken to improve and co-ordinate the use of rights of way and this had been taken up by the Leisure Services Section. It was hoped to compile a list of walks in the district by asking Parish Councils to provide details of planned walks in their area. Members also mentioned that the use of "Way Markers" varied between different parishes. It would be helpful if the parishes were reminded of the Parish Paths Partnership and the assistance that was available from Essex County Council for waymarking.

Members asked who was responsible for reporting cases of blocked or ploughed paths. It was reported that most Parish Councils should have a footpaths officer to monitor paths in the parish and the Ramblers Association was also active in this area. However, any individual could report an obstructed path to the Essex County Council Highways Department.

The Head of Community and Leisure reported that the British Heart Foundation had agreed to support the 'Walk for Health' initiative by providing leaflets and publicity.

The Chairman thanked officers for their support at the meeting.

S1.27

LOCAL AUTHORITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY OF THE HEALTH SERVICE

The Committee received a paper from the West Essex Community Health Council discussing the future role of the local authority in the overview and scrutiny of the health service. Members discussed the paper and in particular the role of this Committee. There was some concern that under the new system relevant information would be more difficult to obtain. However, there was an officer representative on the PCT who should be aware of major issues and it was hoped that Members of this committee could have a role in the Patient Fora when they were established.

S1.28

LEISURE AND CULTURAL STRATEGY REVIEW

During discussion on this item Councillor M A Gayler declared a non-pecuniary interest.

Members were given details of the progress being made towards meeting the objectives of the Leisure and Cultural Strategy, which had been approved in December 1999. The Strategy contained over 100 recommendations which were to be pursued in partnership with other agencies and organisations. A comprehensive review of progress to date had been made against each key recommendation for each area and new/revised policies included. It was clear that the volume of work associated with some activities had increased and in some areas the work had changed direction as a result of customer feedback, reduced resources and the way the projects or initiatives had developed. The Head of Community and Leisure highlighted a number of

significant achievements. An Arts Development Officer had been appointed and was starting to make an impact. The structure of the tourism section had been changed and was proving productive. Disability, sports and tourism fora had each been set up.

Members then discussed the document in detail, concentrating initially on the policies relating to the arts. Members asked for details about the Uttlesford Arts Forum and were advised that separate fora were being set up for the north and south of the district. These involved a number of local arts organisations. In answer to a question from Councillor O'Neill, it was confirmed that the District Council's role in Arts Development was as an enabler and a partner, rather than actually staging events.

A number of Members felt that there was insufficient publicity about the work being carried out in this field. The Head of Community and Leisure said that press releases were issued, but the press would only publish what they considered to be a newsworthy item and it was necessary to be selective in the stories that were put out. Information had been included on the Members' Bulletin in the hope that Members would promote these initiatives throughout their wards. There was a general feeling that the 'What's on in Uttlesford' booklet should be revamped.

At the next meeting the Committee would consider the remainder of the document. Under policies relating to Countryside and Informal Recreation, Councillor A Dean asked for background information on the role of a Countryside Ranger.

A further review of the Strategy would be carried out in another two years. Members asked that the review document be simplified at that time to highlight only those areas where action was being taken. Also Councillor Wilcock asked for a tighter measure in terms of a percentage for the progress of initiatives.

S1.29 **BEST VALUE REVIEWS 2002/03 – MEMBER REFERENCE GROUPS**

Nominations were sought for Members to serve on the Best Value Reviews of Leisure and Culture and Housing Need, due to be carried out during 2002/03.

The Liberal Democrat Group Leader had nominated Councillors Morson and Hibbs respectively but no other nominations had been received.

RESOLVED that Group Leaders be authorised to appoint a Member for each Review Group, the appointments to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Committee.

S1.30 **PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

At the last meeting, Members had raised two questions on the performance monitoring report.

- (i) Members had asked whether this Council had signed up to the Commission for Racial Equality's Code of Practice for rented housing. The Housing Services Manager had commented that the code of practice was very prescriptive and would require a huge amount of monitoring and bureaucracy. The section did not have the resources to cope with this. However, systems were in place to monitor ethnicity in all areas. Research was currently being undertaken in Essex and if there was any problem in this area, the situation would be reviewed. Councillor A Dean asked for further information and it was agreed that a report be prepared for the next meeting.
- (ii) It was confirmed that the figures for road deaths circulated at the previous meeting had related solely to the Uttlesford District. Members were given details of comparative numbers of road deaths from 1995 to 2001 and noted that there was little change in the number for the Uttlesford area.

S1.31

DECISION LISTS

The Committee received the decision lists for the Community and Leisure meeting held on 8 January 2002 and the Health and Housing Committee meeting held on 10 January 2002.

At agenda item 6 of the Community and Leisure Committee, the Head of Community and Leisure explained the changes to the staffing structure for the Community Safety and Emergency Planning functions. Councillor A Dean asked if the Scrutiny Committee could view the programme of work for the three officers, outlining the key objectives for the coming year. Officers replied that the detailed staff work programme was an internal working document and not usually circulated to Members. It was agreed that Officers would seek a solution to this matter.

The meeting ended at 9.55 pm.