

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 – COMMUNITY AND HOUSING held at
COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on
12 JUNE 2002**

Present:- Councillor D J Morson – Chairman.
Councillors A Dean, Mrs C D Down, M A Gayler, P G F Lewis,
R J O'Neill, G W Powers, R C Smith and P A Wilcock.

Also present at the invitation of the Chairman:- Councillors Mrs M A Caton,
R J Copping and Mrs J F Cheetham.

Officers in attendance:- Ms K Chapman, Mrs H Frost, Mrs S McLagan,
S Martin, B D Perkins, M T Purkiss and Mrs C Roberts.

S1.1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D W Gregory,
D M Jones, R A Merrion, Mrs S V Schneider and Mrs E Tealby-Watson.

S1.2 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2002 were received, confirmed
and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

S1.3 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute S1.39 – Countrycare Arrangements

In answer to a question from Councillor A Dean, the Head of Community and Leisure explained that Epping Forest District Council had provided information about its Countrycare policy, which had four monitoring staff but no patrolling rangers. Essex County Council had also provided information about its rangers who had a presence at the Rayne Visitor Services Facility on the Flitch Way. The Head of Community and Leisure Services explained the activities undertaken by the rangers and the support they gave to the public. Councillor Dean referred to an initiative called "Essex First" which sought to revive tourism, particularly use of the footpaths, following the foot and mouth epidemic. The logo featured Uttlesford. He also drew to the attention of the Committee the shortage of footpath signposts on the Forest Way in Uttlesford as compared with Epping in the vicinity of the Hatfield Forest. The Head of Community and Leisure agreed to take this matter up if Councillor Dean provided details of the location.

S1.4 PFI PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received a progress report from Ms K Chapman, the Project Manager, on the Leisure (PFI) project.

She explained that contractual and financial close had occurred on 30 May 2002. The development stage of the project would now occur. The builder would be starting works at the Helena Romanes School in July. There would be a turf cutting ceremony and associated publicity. It was expected that the building would be available by August 2003, as would the Stansted building.

Ms Chapman described the measures taken to minimise disturbance to existing users of the Lord Butler Fitness and Leisure Centre and the school buildings. Good relations with staff and with the existing membership of eg, the Lord Butler Leisure Centre, were being fostered and there were provisions within the contracts to reinforce this.

She outlined details of the organisation of works in response to questions put by Members. Monthly meetings were to be held for the purpose of valuing work carried out and generally checking progress.

In answer to questions from Councillor R C Smith, Ms Chapman explained that a contractor's code had been attached to all contracts requiring restrictions on delivery times to prevent disturbance at key times and to ensure the safety of users of the school buildings. She also answered questions on how normal activities at the Helena Romanes School and at Stansted would be affected by building works.

The Chairman of the Committee thanked Ms Chapman for her detailed, concise and comprehensive report and for all the work she had done towards this excellent project. Councillor Morson also thanked Councillors R J Copping and A Row for the long and substantial work they had carried out to enable the project to go ahead.

S1.5

WORK PROGRAMME 2002/03

The Committee considered the written report of the Committee and Communications Manager on the Work Programme 2002/03. He reminded Members that the Committee had onerous work in the form of scrutiny of the PFI project and of NHS services. In addition there were two best value reviews and the normal day to day business of two programme committees to be considered. It was noted, as regards NHS scrutiny, that the Council's input would probably be at Primary Care Trust level. Three Councillors already worked with the West Essex Community Health Council.

Members considered that, in the light of the fact that a PFI standing progress report had been requested, it would be best to confine the Committee's work programme to those items referred to above.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the items outlined above be included within the work programme for 2002/03, and
- 2 the work programme be reviewed in November 2002.

S1.6 LOCAL AUTHORITY HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Committee and Communications Manager reported on progress with Local Authority Health Overview and Scrutiny. He reminded Members that strategic responsibility would rest with the County Council and that it had set up a County Overview and Scrutiny Committee and a Partnership Forum. Councillor Mrs Flack had been appointed by the County Council to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Councillor Morson had been nominated by this Council. The Regulations would come into force in January 2003.

Councillor M A Gayler asked whether any change was anticipated as regards the Ambulance Service and whether statistics of response times for Uttlesford ambulance services were yet available. Councillor Mrs Cheetham added that figures had been requested by the Community Health Council in the past without success so far. The Committee and Communications Manager would attempt to obtain these details.

Councillor D J Morson expressed concern about the way that the Uttlesford Primary Care Trust would be funded. He understood that over 25% of the funding required would be raised through voluntary fundraising. Councillor Morson was awaiting a letter explaining these arrangements. At this point Councillor Mrs J F Cheetham declared an interest in as much as her husband was a member of the Primary Care Trust Board.

S1.6 INTERNAL AUDITS

The Principal Auditor presented a report on the previous six months which included audits of housing rents, homelessness and the Tourist Information Centre. Members were pleased to note that housing rent arrears had fallen to 2.7%.

Councillor R J Copping referred to a convention whereby the Audit Section usually sent a copy of its detailed report to the Leader and to the Chairman of the appropriate scrutiny committee. He suggested that in future, the Scrutiny Committee should look at the Internal Audit report in depth. Some other Members also expressed the wish that this report should have a wider circulation than at present.

RESOLVED that Group Leaders be asked to consider how this matter might best be handled in the future.

S1.7 BEST VALUE REVIEW OF HOUSING SERVICES – PROGRESS REPORT

Councillor Mrs Caton presented the report of the Member Reference Group on the Best Value Review of Housing Services. The report detailed costs and emerging issues and described two challenge events held at the end of May which had been extremely successful.

Members asked questions about methods used to meet the need for low cost housing and about the advisability of otherwise of having two tenant panels or

of having one strategic panel with local surgeries. It was recognised, however, that centralising might discourage attendance.

Councillor D J Morson thanked the Member Reference Group and officers for an excellent report.

Councillor Gayler asked that the review should look at housing need for the disabled under-sixties.

RESOLVED that the Committee note the progress report.

S1.8

BEST VALUE REVIEW OF LEISURE AND CULTURAL SERVICES – PROGRESS REPORT

Councillor O'Neill presented the report of the Member Reference Group carrying out the Best Value Review of Leisure and Cultural Services. He referred to the costs of these services and the fact that they were all discretionary activities. He said that tourism supported the economic development of the District

He added that the suggestion of a museum trust was attractive in principle. The Reference Group would meet with the Museum Society on 24 June to discuss this and other issues further. Councillor Powers said that the figures for the cost of the museum were distorted by costs for the repair and upkeep of the building. If a trust were set up it would still be difficult for the Council to avoid its role as core funder. He also emphasised the problems of attracting grants to small rural museums.

Councillor Dean expressed the view that the area of Uttlesford was affluent and expectations for leisure services were high. He stressed that the two critical friends on the review group should be involved as much as possible in the deliberations of that group. He also circulated a newspaper article regarding possible redundancies in order to demonstrate the need to approach staffing matters carefully in all best value discussions.

Councillor R J O'Neill expressed the view that the critical friends would play a valuable role, particularly as solutions began to emerge. He felt there should be general reassurance regarding staffing as it was important that staff morale was not affected. He was concerned that staff should not be alarmed by the review.

Councillor M A Gayler referred to the observations of Councillor O'Neill as regards devolvement to town and parish councils and declared an interest insofar as he was a member of the Dunmow Town Council. He felt that any devolvement to town and parish councils should take place in a spirit of partnership.

Councillor R J Copping stressed the need for a lead to be taken in encouraging sponsorship to achieve major steps forwards in provision of larger projects. Councillor G W Powers suggested that arts activities should be provided via the arts forum and that it was important that Members and staff communicate generally.

Councillor D J Morson raised the suggestion that the Bridge End Gardens should be brought within the current review. He added that a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund was to be submitted in November with the result expected hopefully in January.

At this point Councillor O'Neill declared an interest insofar as he was a Friend of the Bridge End Gardens. He explained that it was anticipated that substantial external funding would be forthcoming for the Gardens and the question arose how this money should be managed. He felt that the Bridge End Gardens Working Party's views should be taken on the matter.

The Director of Community Services reminded Members that the completion of the Best Value Review of Planning Services, including Bridge End Gardens, had been extended for six months and suggested that if it were now accelerated in relation to Bridge End Gardens, a greater burden would be placed on planning officers. He added that the particular need now was to concentrate available resources to leveraging additional grant funding

In reply, Councillor R J O'Neill suggested that the planning officers were too over-burdened to give the matter enough time and that the Working Party should look at it. He referred to difficult and unpopular decisions which were required to be faced as regards the management of Bridge End Gardens. Councillor A Dean proposed that the Bridge End Gardens should not form a part of the Best Value Review of Leisure and Cultural Services, although funding of the gardens might be reviewed in the general context of leisure and cultural funding.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the progress report on the Best Value review of Leisure and Cultural Services be noted
- 2 the Bridge End Gardens scheme remain a part of the Best Value Review of Planning Services and the Working Party be asked to consider the matter.

S1.9

COMMUNITY AND LEISURE COMMITTEE – 28 MAY 2002

The Committee considered matters arising from the meeting of the Community and Leisure Committee held on 28 May 2002.

(i) Minutes of District Grants Advisory Panel – 21 May 2002

Councillor G W Powers suggested that the Scrutiny Committee should review the structure of the present grant system in the light of this Minute and the fact that the Council used to have a village initiatives fund for grants. The Head of Community and Leisure reminded Members that there had been a review of this matter 18 months ago. Councillor R C Smith added that there had been concern that the schemes operating under the Village Initiatives Fund were easily abused.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee consider the operation of the grants scheme at its next meeting.

S1.10 **HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE – 30 MAY 2002**

The Committee considered matters arising from the meeting of the Health and Housing Committee held on 30 May 2002.

(i) Hatherley House

Councillor R J O'Neill commented that it was most important that binding conditions be imposed upon the future use by the developer of this property. He understood that the developer had threatened to pull out of the current agreement unless the freehold was sold.

The meeting ended at 9.50 pm.