

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

Present:- Councillor D J Morson – Chairman.
Councillors D W Gregory, P G F Lewis, R A Merrion, R J O'Neill,
Mrs S V Schneider and P A Wilcock.

Also present at the invitation of the Chairman:- Councillor Mrs S Flack.

Officers in attendance:- R Chamberlain, W Cockerell, Mrs S McLagan,
M T Purkiss and Mrs C Roberts.

S1.11 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Dean,
Mrs C D Down, M A Gayler, D M Jones, R C Smith and Mrs E Tealby-
Watson.

S1.12 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2002 were received, confirmed
and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**S1.13 FEEDBACK FROM MEMBER WORKSHOP ON ROLE OF OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY**

The Chairman and Members expressed appreciation of the workshop at
which Mike Brookes had summarised his advice as:-

- (i) Scrutiny subjects should not be limited to those on the agenda of
service committees. The Scrutiny Committees should be proactive and
go out to the community where relevant.
- (ii) Outcomes should be examined as well as procedures.
- (iii) District scrutiny should not shy away from parish issues.
- (iv) Accommodation should be made for subjects overlapping the terms of
reference of more than one scrutiny committee.

Councillor Morson said that, following the advice, he had arranged a public
meeting at Stansted to discuss the future of the Stansted Health Centre. The
meeting had been attended by over 50 local people and had been very
successful in gauging local opinion.

S1.14 **PFI PROGRESS REPORT**

The Head of Community and Leisure gave a report on the progress of the PFI Project since the verbal report made to the Committee on 12 June 2002.

She added that the Leisure Board had expressed the view that it might not be necessary for both the Scrutiny Committee and the Leisure Board to monitor progress. Members nonetheless felt that brief progress reports should continue to be brought to each Scrutiny meeting.

S1.15 **COMMUNITY AND LEISURE GRANT SCHEME**

The Head of Community and Leisure presented a report about existing grant schemes administered by the Community and Leisure Committee for review of the criteria and determination processes. She suggested that paperwork might be lessened if the Voluntary Organisation Support Grant (1 Year) applications were considered by her in consultation with the Chairman of the Community and Leisure Committee.

Members felt that there should be consistency in the criteria and presentation of information such as financial details of organisations applying for grant schemes. They asked that the Community and Leisure Committee should investigate how the current processes could be simplified and merged where possible. It was also considered that parish and town councils should be encouraged to fund local schemes from their precepts. It was also the view that the grant schemes needed to be flexible and allow grants to be carried over in certain circumstances.

S1.16 **LOCAL AUTHORITY HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

The Committee received reports from the Chairman and Councillor D W Gregory about developments in health overview and scrutiny in Essex.

The Chairman and Councillor Gregory had attended a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Partnership Forum, the purpose of which was to recommend a programme of work and to co-ordinate activity. The forum had received a progress report on a project about delayed discharge from Essex hospitals. Suggestions were being sought for a work programme to cover the period January 2003 to May 2003 and the two-year period thereafter. Patient fora were being introduced into each NHS Trust.

Members asked that appointments systems and lengthy waits in hospital for outpatient treatment be examined at the February meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Partnership Forum.

S1.17 **ESSEX AMBULANCE SERVICE – RESPONSE TIMES**

The Committee considered a report showing statistics of response times of the Essex Ambulance Service relating to the Uttlesford District. The statistics showed good response times for urgent calls, but Members were particularly

concerned at the imbalance between the very poor performance for Category A (8 minute calls) and the good performance for Category B (19 minute calls).

RESOLVED that the Chairman of the Essex Ambulance Service be requested to provide replies to Members' questions about the differences between call categories and the reasons for varying response times between areas.

S1.18 **HOUSING BEST VALUE REVIEW 2002/03**

The Committee considered the report of the Member Reference Group on the Best Value Review of Housing Services.

The Head of Housing Services described the response received following the bench marking process. Relevant issues arising were set out in "The way forward" and the next step was to finalise a draft action plan. Details were still awaited of the Homelessness Act 2002 and these should be assimilated within the list of action to be taken. The details had a particular bearing on allocation and it was expected that they would be available for the next January meeting.

In answer to a question, the Head of Housing Services explained the tenure differences between "shared equity" housing and affordable housing. Members expressed concern about the needs of key workers and the lack of affordable housing. Councillor Mrs Flack suggested that the County Council should be contacted regarding their definition of key workers.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Housing Services for the clear and succinct report and thanked the Best Value Reference Group for their work and Rod Chamberlain and Will Cockerell for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED that the Committee accepts the report and that officers ask for the Essex County Council definition of "key worker" for use in the action plan.

S1.19 **BEST VALUE REVIEW OF LEISURE AND CULTURAL SERVICES – PROGRESS REPORT**

The Committee considered the report of the Member Reference Group on best value review of leisure and cultural services.

The report explained that since the last meeting, the Member Reference Group had concentrated on meeting staff of the Uttlesford District Council and Essex County Council to find out what services were undertaken. The Reference Group had received information on recreation facilities available in each town and parish, council grants towards community facilities and council assistance to organisations and clubs. A preliminary meeting had taken place with the Museum Society's Best Value Working Party which had been asked about trust status, charges, income generation and development of Museum services.

With a view to making comparisons, questionnaires had been sent to 11 authorities of which 5 had replied.

The report referred to general and specific questions previously asked in the context of reviewing leisure and cultural services and referred to the Audit Commission's best value website, detailing 150 inspections of leisure and cultural services in 2002 from which the key message was that councils should set a clear direction for services. The report concluded that some options for improvements were beginning to emerge, which would be presented in an oral report by the Chairman of the Member Reference Group. For the future, the challenge and compare work remained to be completed as did work about emerging options. The final report, which would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee, would give the basic facts about the services' performance and an action plan with dates of achievement.

Councillor O'Neill expressed thanks to officers for their hard work in the preparation of the report. He stated that it was not possible to benchmark because the expenditure on leisure and cultural services was all discretionary. It was his personal feeling that the main expenditure, on the Museum and the leisure centres, was correctly prioritised. Three leisure centres were needed because of the large rural nature of the District and the Museum was an asset to the whole area. Trust Status had been considered but no advantages to the Council would be realised through this approach. Discussions with members of the Museum Society suggested that the Council could and should be doing more to support the Museum. He suggested that arts and sport were well provided for but they wanted funding, advice and help with promotion and that grants to clubs should be made subject to a condition of matching funding. He felt that it was right to provide services for young people. In the context of tourism, the "What's On" magazine should be made more eye catching and be given a better format. He said that the Council's parks and open spaces were tourist attractions, in particular, Bridge End and Jubilee Gardens, and should be managed by Community & Leisure Services to ensure quality. He assured Members that he hoped to submit a report to the meeting in November although further work was to be undertaken on costs and activities carried out, charges for courses/activities and grants.

Councillor Mrs S Flack reminded the meeting that many Members felt provision of grants by precepting authorities to be preferable to match funding of grants by the District Council.

Members exchanged ideas on improvements which might be made to the services provided, including the seeking of sponsorship and better commercial arrangements for the Museum. Councillor O'Neill stressed that he hoped the Local Service Agreement would provide for funding from the Essex County Council to support District Council operations, eg, in youth service work.

The Chairman of the Committee stressed that it was inappropriate to scrutinise museum services until completion of the best value review.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the direction that the next stage of the review is to take. Page 4

S1.20 **COMMUNITY AND LEISURE COMMITTEE – 3 SEPTEMBER 2002**

There were no matters arising for consideration.

S1.21 **HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE – 5 SEPTEMBER 2002**

The Committee considered matters arising from the meeting of the Health and Housing Committee held on 5 September 2002.

In answer to a question, the Head of Housing Services explained that, as regards redistribution of housing capital receipts, any new regime would come into operation at the end of April 2004. A report was being made to the Resources Committee that this resource should be kept within Uttlesford.

S1.22 **WALK FOR HEALTH**

Councillor D W Gregory drew attention to a walk for health arranged for 28 September 2002.

The meeting ended at 9.54 pm.