

**COMMUNITY AND HOUSING COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL
OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 21
JANUARY 2010**

Present: Councillor R H Chamberlain (Chairman)
Councillors E C Abrahams, S Anjum,
E L Bellingham-Smith, M L Foley, E Gower, J E Hudson,
J E Menell, M Miller, D J Morson, J A Redfern, D J Sadler
and S V Schneider.

Also present: Cllr A J Ketteridge.

Tenant Forum Representatives: Mrs D Cornell and Mr D Parish.

Officers in attendance: G Bradley (Community Partnerships
Manager), D Burridge (Director of Operations),
W Cockerell (Principal Environmental Health Officer),
T Cowper (Principal Accountant), S Joyce (Chief Finance
Officer), R Millership (Head of Housing Services),
E Petrie (Housing Management Manager), R Procter
(Democratic Services Officer), G Smith (Head of
Environmental Health), J Snares (Housing
Options/Homelessness Manager), C Thomas (HRA
Accountant) and S Wood (Housing and Planning Policy
Manager).

CH45 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E Gower, S
Howell, G Sell and C Smith.

Councillors Ketteridge and Sadler declared their personal interest as
members of Saffron Walden Town Council. Councillor Hudson
declared a personal interest as a member of Stansted Parish Council.

CH46 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2009 were received,
confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to
the following amendment:

Minute CH37 – the Minutes should include reference to discussion
which took place on the subject of grants. Members had concluded
that the question of whether a parish council had applied for a grant in
relation to a scheme should be taken into account when considering
whether it was appropriate for this Council to fund schemes.

MATTERS ARISING**(i) Minute CH35(ii) – Audley End – Representations to the National Trust**

In the absence of any response to the letter sent, Councillor Chamberlain asked for representations to be made to a higher level within the organisation.

(ii) Minute CH37 – Holloway Crescent, Leaden Roding

Councillor Redfern proposed setting up a task group to consider development options for the Holloway Crescent site once the bungalows were vacated. The Chairman said whereas the Housing Initiatives Working Group was already dealing with a significant workload, an additional Task Group could bring a time limited report after six months.

RESOLVED that a Task Group be appointed with the following terms of reference and membership:

- 1 to consider proposals for the development of Holloway Crescent, Leaden Roding;
- 2 a final report to be required within six months, membership to comprise a total of five Members, three from the administration, one from the Liberal Democrat group, and one from the Independent group.

(iii) Minute CH40 – Cessation of sandbags

Councillor Schneider asked whether parish councils had been contacted on the decision not to supply sandbags. The Director of Operations said the situation regarding sandbags had been publicised in Uttlesford Life. An information session on flood defences was being arranged but a date had not yet been set.

Councillor Chamberlain said it was important to target areas prone to flooding. Councillor Morson said whilst he appreciated debate on sandbag provision had concluded, he was concerned about consistency of ability across those parish councils to whom the responsibility for issuing sandbags was devolved. It was important to be satisfied that all were able to deal with the question of flooding should it arise. The Chairman asked that the Emergency Planning Officer in her report to the March meeting should outline details of her discussion with the parish councils and how problems could be resolved.

Councillor Foley spoke about the arrangements necessary in flooding hotspots and in the larger conurbations. During an emergency central co-ordination was needed, and a telephone number made available. He did not think residents were in fact aware that the situation had changed.

The Chairman said the measure was intended to improve efficiency, and to permit people to take control of the situation locally. A report was requested for the next meeting.

CH48

CHAIRMAN'S ITEMS

The Chairman offered his congratulations to officers and Housing Association representatives on obtaining a grant for development of Leaden Roding. This was excellent news, as Uttlesford was one of only four authorities in this area to achieve this funding.

Regarding the Lord Butler Leisure Centre, he had met with representatives who had explained the position with regard to closure of the pool, due to technical reasons. Leisure Centre staff would issue a further press release taking into account various points raised at the meeting.

Finally, the Chairman apologised for the absence from this agenda of the minutes of the Housing Initiatives Working Group, as this meeting had been re-scheduled from 7 to 20 January due to the bad weather. Subjects of discussion had been the development programme, on which updates would be received over the next year; and the annual housing conference, which would be considered at the meeting in March.

CH49

LEAD OFFICER'S REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Operations, which set out updates on vacant council homes (voids); red telephone kiosk adoption; the PLACE scheme; the impact of the recession on homelessness figures; and community achievement awards.

Regarding voids, turnaround figures were improving and had been reduced from 73 to 39 days. This figure included properties receiving major works. The housing service had been looking at this area, which had also been subject to scrutiny by Performance Select Committee. Separate performance indices would be applied after April to major and minor repairs, which would give a more accurate picture. A report on the Business Improvements Teams review of performance indicator SI20 (number of days a property is void) was going to Performance Select Committee.

The Chairman asked that the next Lead Officer's report should include an update on voids.

Regarding the PLACE scheme, the Chairman congratulated officers and said it would be helpful if the Committee could know the numbers of long term empty properties involved and how they were classified. The Principal Environmental Health Officer said that Council Tax records were used to identify the total number of long term empty properties. However, he was aware of a small number of long term empty properties that were the subject of complaints and concerns, and he was building up a dossier with a view to assessing whether enforcement action could be used to bring them back in to use. The Chairman asked for more information at the next meeting.

In reply to a question from Councillor Morson about the factors influencing the reluctance of owners to access this government funding, the Principal Environmental Health Officer explained that the owner of a property had to volunteer to place their property with a housing association for three years. Officers had lodged a submission with GO East regarding the more flexible use of PLACE funding.

Regarding the impact of the recession on housing options and homelessness, the Director of Operations said there had been an increased level of activity, and a further increase immediately after the Christmas break. Due to effective prevention work, figures for 2009/10 remained similar to those for 2008/09. There were also three clients who were potentially eligible for the government's mortgage rescue scheme.

Regarding Community Achievement Awards, officers were proposing to hold a summer event. Councillor Menell said she was delighted that the awards were to be reinstated, and said she trusted the Member Task Group would be involved in planning the event, as this had originally been a Member initiative.

CH50

PEST CONTROL REVIEW GROUP

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Environmental Health. The report made various recommendations relating to the pest control service.

Councillor Morson asked for clarification of the recommended removal of the discretionary discount for those over 65. Officers explained a review had been carried out by Scrutiny Committee on standardising fees and charges across the Council. The recommendation for the next financial year was to give discounts only where residents were in receipt of a Council administered benefit.

The Chief Finance Officer said the Scrutiny Committee had advocated consistency in pricing and concessions. Members' views had been invited informally in the Members' Bulletin of 4 December 2009, with the intention of formulating the policy to be implemented in April 2011. So far only two responses had been received, and he reiterated the invitation to Member to express views.

Councillor Chamberlain proposed a review and update to be provided to the Committee after six months.

RESOLVED that

- 1 No charges be introduced for the treatment of rats in domestic premises for 2010/11.
- 2 The pest control service remain in-house, and the recommended ways of reducing the net cost of providing the service be adopted, including:
 - i. Increasing the charges for and number of contacts with commercial premises
 - ii. Removing the discretionary discount for people aged 65 and over (but retaining it for those in receipt of Council benefits)
- 3 the effect of removing the concessions to those aged 65 and over, in terms of hardship, be monitored during the year 2010/11
- 4 appropriate steps be taken to increase public awareness of the service, for example, in Uttlesford Life, parish magazines, the Phone Book and the Web
- 5 Consideration be given to the practicability of introducing an extra charge for rapid response to requests for the pest control service
- 6 An update to be provided to the Committee six months after implementation of these provisions.

CH51 **2009/10 BUDGET MONITORING**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer and the Director of Operations. The report set out income and expenditure for the period April to November 2009, and a forecast for the end of 2009/10. The Chief Finance Officer explained the conclusions of the report. In summary, the Committee's General Fund was forecast to overspend by £17,000, and therefore would be within 1% of budget by the end of the year. The General Fund Capital Programme showed no variances forecasted. The HRA Capital Programme was expected to overspend by £93,000, mainly due to a planned acceleration of a boiler replacement programme, which would be funded from the Housing Revenue Account. The Chief Finance Officer said the Housing

Revenue Account was forecast to end the financial year with a reasonably healthy working balance.

RESOLVED that the Committee approve the report of the Chief Finance Officer and Director of Operations, the information in the report to be collated into a report covering the Council's corporate financial position to be received by the Finance and Administration Committee on 28 January.

CH52

2010/11 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT REVENUE BUDGET AND RENT LEVELS

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer and Head of Housing. The report set out the 2010/11 HRA budget and asked Members to approve it, along with increases in rent levels and other charges.

The Chief Finance Officer said the HRA budget had been discussed in depth at the Tenant Forum meeting. They noted that inflation was now 2.9% and that the average rent increase was to be just below inflation at 1.5%. The Tenant Forum had indicated they would support the recommendations with one proviso: that garage rents be increased to an average of £8.75 (an increase of 3.5%) to bring in additional income of £4 - £5K. The preferred view of officers was to apply the increase of 1.5% both for rents and garage rents, to facilitate administration.

In conclusion an in-year surplus of £75K was forecast, after additional investment in stock. Whilst medium term financial planning was necessary, there was therefore currently a healthy working balance above target for the next financial year.

The Chairman said it was encouraging that the proposed increase was below inflation, and that the figures resulted in a decrease in the negative housing subsidy figure. He was pleased that a much healthier balance was projected.

Mrs Cornell said the Tenant Forum had been pleased with the result of the government's formula. The Forum felt garage rents should be increased by 3.5%, to £8.75 per week, bringing in additional revenue. Many garages were not currently let, and garage letting should therefore be promoted across the district through advertising in local newsletters. Mr Parish agreed the publicising of garages to let was important, and it was this aspect, rather than increased revenue, which he felt was significant.

Councillor Chamberlain agreed maximising garage lettings was important, but an increase over and above the rents increase of 1.5% could have been counterproductive.

Councillor Redfern proposed that garage rents should be increased by 3.5% to an average of £8.75. Councillor Schneider expressed concern such an increase would be greater than the rate of inflation and more than double the increase for rents.

Each recommendation being put separately, it was resolved as follows, with item 3 being carried on the casting vote of the Chairman:

- RESOLVED that the Committee recommend to Full Council
- 1 the Housing Revenue Account 2010/11 Original Budget as shown in Appendix A to the report
 - 2 an average increase in dwelling rents of 1.5%
 - 3 an increase in garage rents of 1.5%
 - 4 other charges to increase in line with actual costs incurred

CH53

CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2009/10 TO 2014/15

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer and the Principal Accountant. The report asked the Committee to approve its 2010/11 capital programme, which would then be subject to final determination by the Council in February. For illustrative purposes only, an indicative programme for the years 2011/12 to 2014/15 was provided. The Committee were informed of two amendments to the report: the Strategic Management Board had approved an increase in the budget for Community Project Grants from £30,000 to £70,000 per year; and two new grants had been identified since writing the report, each of £50,000, for playground equipment in Felsted and Thaxted.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the Committee approve its 2010/11 capital programme as set out in the report, subject to the two amendments to the Appendix set out in the Minute.
- 2 to note the indicative capital programme for 2011/12 to 2014/15

CH54

2010/11 FEES AND CHARGES

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer and the Director of Operations. The Chief Finance Officer said that despite inflation of 2.9%, the Strategic Management Board had made the decision to continue with the proposals for fees and charges set out in the report, and to take a higher inflation figure into account the following year. He invited Members to respond to the consultation on fees and charges publicised in the Members' Bulletin on 4 December.

RESOLVED

That the Committee approve the 2010/11 fees and charges as set out in Appendix A to the report.

CH55

2010/11 COMMUNITY AND HOUSING COMMITTEE GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET

The Chief Finance Officer presented his report requesting the Committee to approve its 2010/11 revenue budget, which would then be subject to final determination by Council on 18 February.

Councillor Ketteridge said, regarding grants relating to Homestart and Uttlesford Crossroads, that it was partly correct to state these had been in recent years been funded by Saffron Walden Town Council. He said Uttlesford had up until 2004 funded both bodies, but that since then the Town Council had funded Crossroads. Both organisations were district-wide, and it was right that both should revert to the District Council.

RESOLVED

That the Committee approve its 2010/11 revenue budget as set out in Appendix A to the report.

CH56

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION – STANSTED

The Housing Options/Homelessness Manager presented a report advising Members of the need to re-evaluate the use of land in Manor Road, Stansted. She reminded Members of the various delays in development of the site due to resolution of a footpath diversion, and gave a summary of reasons why the original proposals were no longer feasible. She explained that the housing association had not been able to obtain HCA funding, and consequently in order to proceed as planned the Council would have been obliged not only to provide the land, but also to pay a capital lease sum. The delay now gave an opportunity to reconsider the original proposal in the light of changing circumstances. An alternative site in Molehill Green had been identified for conversion to emergency homeless accommodation, as the current properties were difficult to let in view of their location within the footprint of the proposed second runway at Stansted Airport. It was proposed to use the garage site in Stansted for two social housing units.

Councillor Morson said he welcomed the proposal, and asked how much the conversion would cost. Officers replied that this figure was not yet known, but that provision of all four units would be approximately £75K. In response to a question, officers said bus links

were very good from Molehill Green, and this was a positive factor in identifying this site.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the garage site in Manor Road, Stansted be used to provide two permanent two bedroom social housing units
- 2 two units of Council accommodation that are within the proposed Stansted Airport second runway footprint at Molehill Green, Takeley be converted to provide four units of emergency homeless accommodation.

CH57

OUT OF HOURS AND WEEKEND SHELTERED HOUSING SERVICE

Mr Parish of the Tenant Forum addressed the Committee. He said he had been contacted by several members of the Tenant Forum, who had voiced their concern and disappointment that this item had not first been discussed by the Forum and that they had not had the opportunity to offer their recommendations to this Committee. This item affected a large number of tenants, for whom the Tenant Forum had been set up. Last year the Forum had been told there were various suggestions concerning sheltered housing, which they had understood would come to the Forum for their input and to permit them to gain a better understanding of the issues. The Tenant Forum therefore requested that the Committee postpone discussion of this item to allow it to be considered at the meeting on 1 February. Comments and recommendations from the Forum should then be presented to the Committee at its next meeting. Mr Parish thanked Members for hearing what he had to say.

Councillor Chamberlain asked that the Committee respond to Mr Parish after hearing a summary of the report.

The Housing Management Manager presented her report, which outlined the findings of a recent consultation with sheltered housing tenants. The aim of the review was to explore how the Council could provide a more efficient and robust service. The review had been progressed by the Sheltered Housing Task Group, representation on which was drawn from Members, Supporting People, the Tenant Forum, and the PCT.

She said it had been apparent for some time, and not just through this review, that sheltered tenants were unhappy with the level of service they currently received. For example, many sheltered tenants still worked, and did not wish to receive a daily visit. She wished to stress that the intention was not to remove the sheltered service. As a minimum everyone would have access to telecare equipment, response service and the presence of a warden at the scheme. For

those who still wished to have a daily visit, it was intended to enhance that aspect of the service.

The issue of minor repairs currently took up a disproportionate amount of Sheltered Housing Officers' time, and the proposals therefore included provision for a 'Handy Person' to resolve this issue.

The Council's current Careline provider, North Herts, provided a monitoring rather than a response service. Sheltered Housing Officers were therefore required to work to a rota for evening and weekend calls across the entire district, resulting in significant staff recruitment and retention challenges. Discussions had been taking place with a provider, Carecall, which could provide a response service using locally employed staff.

The Head of Housing Management concluded by drawing attention to proposals for a three-tiered service for sheltered housing. Sheltered tenants could move between these levels as necessary, according to their changing circumstances and needs.

Councillor Chamberlain said he noted from the recent Minutes of the Task Group that the Tenants' representative had attended and that he had appeared to endorse the report. Councillor Redfern said she was surprised to learn that the representative did not now support this view, and that this approval was not apparently representative of the Tenant Forum's views.

Councillor Chamberlain asked officers for an indication of the timetable for bringing the results of the consultation to the County Council. Officers explained there was a time limit of April for implementation of recommendations, and that the extensive process of one to one consultations with all sheltered tenants was to commence immediately (subject to the decision of the Committee).

Mrs Cornell said she agreed with Mr Parish, that the Forum had not seen any final outcomes reported from the review. She expressed concern at the proposed charges for the three-level service.

Further discussion took place on the implications of a delay in the consultation. Councillor Schneider said whilst there had indeed been a full debate at this meeting, she would like the Tenant Forum to have a chance to consider the proposals and for their comments to be taken into account, if this was possible without missing the deadline.

In the absence of a proposer for a motion on behalf of the Tenant Forum, to postpone a decision on this item until after the Forum's meeting on 1 February, Councillor Chamberlain concluded Members were content to proceed. Councillor Redfern expressed disappointment that the Tenant Forum felt information from the Task Group had not been passed to them, as she had chaired that Group for

some time, and the tenants' representatives had received input on this item.

It was noted there was a further meeting of the Task Group on 26 February, which could receive the Tenant Forum's comments. The Housing Management Manager reiterated that individual consultations on level of service had to be conducted a month in advance of the concluding report to Essex County Council. Members noted there would be an opportunity to review the initiative in a year's time; that the consultation had to proceed immediately in order to comply with the stated timetable; but that the Tenant Forum should be given the opportunity to submit comments to the Sheltered Housing and Lifeline Task Group.

RESOLVED

- 1 to agree the recommendations of the Sheltered Housing Task Group to implement
 - i) a more personalised level of support to sheltered housing service users, including the provision of a 'Handy Person'
 - ii) a full out of hours and weekend response service to all sheltered and Lifeline subscribers by Carecall on a trial basis for one year.
- 2 That the report before the Committee be considered by the Tenant Forum at their next meeting, their comments to be brought forward to the Sheltered Housing Task Group.

CH58

USE OF GROWTH AREA FUNDING TO SECURE AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The Committee considered the report of the Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager. Under the terms of the planning agreement enabling Stansted Airport to develop the existing runway, a fund of £2.2 million for the provision of affordable housing had been made available through the Stansted Area Housing Partnership. The area in which this fund could be applied comprised Uttlesford and Harlow districts, and parts of Braintree and East Hertfordshire districts. The partnership had also recently received £1.4 million Growth Area funding to provide an eco exemplar affordable housing development. Uttlesford was the lead authority and had to secure the site and then draw down the funding from Harlow Renaissance. The Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager said unfortunately there were no schemes available within Uttlesford, and therefore the report asked

Members to authorise officers to seek a valuation for sites for affordable housing in Harlow.

Members asked a number of questions. Regarding checks and guarantees in respect of recouping the cost of the land, officers said a grant agreement, which had been carefully considered by senior officers, had been entered into with Harlow Renaissance, the regeneration body for Harlow. The fund had to be used by March 2011, and a commitment to do so would be required by March this year. The identification of suitable land had been difficult as high values had been asked for land within Uttlesford, including land owned by the County Council. The money could not be used by individual parish councils, as sites had to be shared with the partners.

The sites identified were discussed. Councillor Redfern asked whether the land at Holloway Crescent could be included as a proposal for Growth Area funding. The Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager replied proposals had to be completed by the next day but that the site could be proposed as a possible scheme. The Task Group could then discuss the proposal at its first meeting and draw up a development brief.

RESOLVED

- 1 officers be authorised to obtain a valuation for the sites for affordable housing in Harlow for the Stansted Area Housing Partnership
- 2 the Committee recommend to Full Council that the sites in Harlow be purchased by this Council for the SAHP development programme for the value determined by the District Valuer, provided that the valuation is satisfactory in terms of the viability of the scheme as an affordable housing development, and the payment can be successfully claimed back from Harlow Renaissance, the holders of the Growth Area Funding.
- 3 The Committee recommend to Full Council the transfer of the sites to Moat Housing Group, the SAHP delivery partner for the scheme, for a nominal sum.

CH59

AREA FORUM UPDATE

The Community Partnerships Manager gave a verbal summary of the recent meetings of the North and South Area Forums. At both meetings, Highways issues had been the theme of presentations. Gritting policy and practice had been the subject of several questions. Other questions had sought information on speeding in villages, and traffic management in Saffron Walden. Regarding road safety here had been good news in that figures for KSI (killed and seriously injured)

had decreased during the years 2007 to 2009 from 59 to 36, attributed to good partnership working.

There had been about 30 to 40 attendees at both meetings. Two further meetings of the Area Forums had been scheduled, to deal with consultation on the Local Development Framework. The South Area meeting would take place on 2 March in Dunmow, and the North Area Forum would be on 4 March in Saffron Walden.

CH60

GREENWAYS PLAY AREA

The Committee considered the report of the Community Partnerships Manager. The report updated Members on recent developments regarding the Greenways play area and sought approval to redirect the Big Lottery funding towards upgrading the Saffron Walden Town Council's play area on Saffron Walden Common.

Councillor Chamberlain referred the Committee to comments he had received from Councillor Howell in his absence. He had expressed concern that no survey had been carried out on this matter. However, with this report, it seemed that situation had been superseded by developments.

The Community Partnerships Officer explained the background to the proposal as set out in the report. A sum of £20,000 had been obtained from the Big Lottery for refurbishment of the Greenways play area. A resident had subsequently expressed the view that the majority of residents either did not want to see the play area reinstated, or had no particular views. Although it had been decided to carry out a consultation, a subsequent request had been received from Saffron Walden Town Clerk that the funds be used to refurbish the play area on The Common. As no further communication with the residents around Greenways had been received for some months, and in view of the fact that the play area at The Common would benefit the Town as a whole, officers were now recommending diverting the funding to upgrade the play area at the Common.

RESOLVED to approve the transfer of the Big Lottery Funding of £20,000 to Saffron Walden Town Council to upgrade the play area on Saffron Walden Common.

CH61

CITIZENS' PANELS

The Committee noted the report of the Head of Community Engagement, updating Members on progress made towards development of a Citizens' Panel.

TENANT FORUM MINUTES

The Committee considered the report of the Housing Management Manager, which provided Members with the Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Forum held on 9 November 2009.

Councillor Chamberlain said the Tenants' comments regarding the sheltered housing review had been noted. Regarding the reference in the Minutes to refusal on the part of some tenants to allow access to their properties for maintenance of their boiler, he expressed concern at the danger of failing to allow annual servicing of boilers to take place, and asked what action officers proposed to take. The Head of Housing Services said she had reviewed the Council's policy with the contractor and with the Council's legal team. Following institution of the new policy approximately six months ago, there had been a huge improvement in compliance. The requirement to allow access for maintenance of the boiler was set down in the Tenants' handbook. For persistent non-compliance, services could be disconnected.

The Chairman said he had no other urgent items, and thanked all those present.

The meeting ended at 9.30 pm.