

COMMUNITY AND HOUSING COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 12 NOVEMBER 2009

Present: Councillor R H Chamberlain (Chairman)
Councillors E L Bellingham-Smith, E Gower, S J Howell,
J E Hudson, J E Menell, D J Morson, J A Redfern, G Sell
and S V Schneider.

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

Officers in attendance: D Burrige (Director of Operations), L
Lipscombe (Emergency Planning Officer), R Millership
(Head of Housing Services), E Petrie (Housing
Management Manager), C Roberts (Democratic Services
Officer), and J Snares (Housing Options/Homelessness
Manager).

CH33 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M Miller and from Mrs J Bullen and Mr P Salvidge, Co-opted Members (Saffron Walden Museum Society). There were no declarations of interest.

CH34 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2009 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CH35 MATTERS ARISING

- (i) Minute CH22 (v) – review of pest control**
Councillor S Howell inquired why the Council provided this service particularly since it was commercially priced. The Chairman informed the meeting that a further review meeting was scheduled for 23 November and that the results would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.
- (ii) Minute CH23 – Audley End – Representations to the National Trust**
Officers reported that no reply had as yet been received to the Council's letter.
- (iii) Minute CH24 – Felsted conveniences**

Councillor Bellingham-Smith reported that the Parish Council was now experiencing better liaison with the leaseholder of the public house.

(iv) Minute CH29 – Area Forums

Councillor Menell referred to a proposal to promote citizens' panels through the Council and she asked that a report on this be brought to a future meeting.

(v) Minute CH32 – New Tenant Forum

In answer to a question Mrs D Cornell confirmed that there would be no election for the new Forum. She added that there was a full complement of members on the Forum.

RESOLVED that a report on Citizens' Panels be brought to a future meeting.

CH36

CHAIRMAN'S ITEMS

(i) "Open letter"

The Chairman drew attention to a document, referred to as an open letter, which had been received by the Council and circulated to the local Community and others from Mr R Blacklock. Copies of it were tabled at the meeting.

The Chairman made the following statement in reply to the "Open Letter":-

"Statement to Community Committee

Following the last meeting of the Committee Mr Blacklock from the Holloway Crescent Sheltered Accommodation Concern Group contacted the Communication Officer and complained about alleged comments made at the last meeting.

Accordingly I agreed to make a statement tonight.

Mr Blacklock alleged I called him a liar regarding the record of the June meeting of the Committee. In addition Mr Blacklock has circulated a document referred to as an open letter to the local community and others, which has been circulated tonight to Members of this Committee.

I did not call Mr Blacklock a liar. I would not use such terminology. All I said was that the Minutes of the June meeting clearly stated that members of the public were in attendance. It would appear that there is a statement on the CMIS page covering all meetings which states 'no visitors were present' however clearly this was not stated on the

Minutes at our last meeting. I understand (and hope) officers are dealing with correcting the CMIS. This is outside the remit of the Committee. I should add that last time I requested that correct details of our meetings, as recorded in the actual minutes are included in any future open letters.

For the record I accept that I did interrupt Mr Blacklock's address to the Committee last time purely to inform him that he was out of time. He was however allowed to finish his statement. Finally I think it unlikely that I could bully or cajole Members of this Committee as has been alleged, especially with two former Chairmen and many other very experienced councillors being Members of the Committee and Council."

The Chairman added that other Members had agreed with his recollection of the meeting.

The Director of Operations confirmed that the CMIS page had been amended and that the web-site officer had apologised to Mr Blacklock.

RESOLVED that the Chairman's statement be noted.

(ii) Environment Committee Workshop

Members were informed that the Energy Efficiency Surveyor had requested their attendance at a workshop to be held immediately before the next meeting of the Council.

CH37

LEAD OFFICER'S REPORT

The Lead Officer took Members through the report, and answered questions.

Councillor Redfern offered her congratulations to officers on the action taken by them to progress provision of bungalows at Holloway Crescent.

RESOLVED

That the Lead Officer's report be noted and that reports be brought to future meetings of the Committee concerning:-

- 1 The Holloway Crescent development;
- 2 Development of temporary accommodation at Stansted (next meeting);
- 3 Proposals for the Castle transfer and Museum funding (with a copy of any relevant report to the Environment Committee);
- 4 Greenways Play area
- 5 Investigation of reinstatement of the Community Achievement Awards.

CH38 HOUSING OPTIONS APPRAISAL

The Committee considered a report from the Head of Housing Services on the newly completed Options Appraisal as regards the future management and maintenance of the Council's housing stock.

The report made reference to the current Stock Condition Survey, Stock Options Appraisal report and HRA Business plan, and concluded that in terms of the Council's ability to meet its housing investment requirement, based on new stock data provided and resources available, it was projected that a balanced position could be achieved until 2013/14 and that there was no immediate need to look at different options to manage the stock. It would also be prudent to await the conclusion of the Government's consultation on housing finance as this may bring about a change in the way the HRA balances looked in the future and may give some answers to the capital shortfall.

The increased demand in disabled adaptations, including the provision of level access showers, stair lifts and grab rails, would need to be considered when anticipating the financial requirements over the next 30 years and, if necessary, the business plan adjusted accordingly.

In the meantime, as the HRA cannot be allowed to fall into deficit, officers would need to work with the tenant forum to construct an action plan to tackle the required savings or to identify other alternative means of financing the identified capital shortfalls.

RESOLVED that the report of the Head of Housing Services be noted

CH39 CONDITION SURVEY OF THE HOUSING STOCK

The Committee considered a report from the Head of Housing Services on an overview from the recent Stock Condition Survey Report. Officers presented the report, which gave details of projected costs of planned maintenance of all types over a period of thirty years on the basis of maintaining the stock in the current condition.

It was shown in the data collected that the Council compared favourably with other authorities in its average property energy rating, which reflected the investment made in energy saving measures for the stock.

The final report had concluded that the stock was in reasonably good condition and that investment had been made in the stock over recent years with many properties benefiting from new, modern components.

However, in order to maintain the stock continued investment would be required.

A new capital programme would be drawn up to incorporate the work priorities recommended by the survey report in consultation with the tenant forum. In the proposed programme for 2010 and beyond, the works would be targeted at actual and potentially non-decent properties.

RESOLVED that the report of the Head of Housing Services be noted.

CH40

CESSATION OF SANDBAGS

The District Emergency Planning Officer submitted a report recommending that the Council cease the supply of sandbags as part of its emergency response to flooding and gave reasons why the Emergency Planning Department was recommending this change in policy.

The District Emergency Planning Officer explained that there had been historically lack of efficiency and speed between the request from the general community for sandbags and the deployment of staff and vehicles and actual delivery to the recipient. Nevertheless there was an unrealistic expectation on the part of some members of the public suffering from flooding, that the council could and would deliver sandbags upon immediate request.

Efforts to do this had an effect on the business continuity of street services, requiring the rescheduling of normal patterns of work. Also staff deployment, during the hours of darkness to respond to calls from the out of hours service for sandbags, was seen as an unacceptable risk. Further, staff were not trained for working in water, and in most incidents of flooding there were no more than one or two properties affected at each location.

The District Emergency Planning Officer suggested that the Parish Councils were better placed to carry out this sort of activity and should be encouraged to do so.

Councillor Howell felt that the District Council should try to do the job better rather than giving up, but other Members felt the Parishes could and in some cases were already doing a good job in this respect.

Councillor Schneider thought the Parishes should be given help with their emergency plans including a list of material providers. She added that she felt the Environment Agency was prone to shirk its

responsibilities for rivers, and that the District Council should tackle the Agency about this.

Councillor Morson stressed the importance of involving all Parishes and the District Emergency Planning Officer confirmed that all had been approached.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the Committee agrees upon the proposed policy for the cessation of delivery and supply of all sandbags.
- 2 to support information and education within all affected communities in liaison with Parish Councils.

CH41

RED TELEPHONE KIOSKS

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Operations about consultation by BT regarding under-used payphone kiosks, which had provided updated information in the following terms:

BT had opened a further consultation until 2 January 2010 and had asked for the identified boxes to be considered for adoption for £1. If a Parish Council wished to proceed they would become responsible for the red kiosk and BT would remove the telephone. BT did not plan to remove any kiosks at the moment but said they would continue to monitor their use and costs and may consult for this purpose in the future. They were aware that some of the kiosks were listed structures and could not be removed.

BT had placed notices in all the 42 kiosks they had put up for adoption advising members of the public to contact the local authority planning department to express their views on the adoption proposal. BT has also advised Parish Councils of this proposal.

The District Council was required to undertake this consultation exercise and collate a response to BT by 2 January 2010. The options available to us were:

Agree to the removal of service to allow adoptions to proceed,
Object to the removal of the payphone service and not allow adoptions to proceed. If we do object we would need to include justifications in our final decision. BT was free to challenge any unreasonable objections within the provision of the appeals process. Objections should fall within the provisions of section 49 of the Communications Act 2003.”

BT now required agreement from the District Council for the removal of the telephony service from these kiosks in order that the kiosks could be offered for adoption by Parish Councils.

Some Members expressed regret that the telephone boxes were falling into disuse.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the proposal by BT involving the removal of a payphone service from kiosks in various locations is noted.
- 2 that any application to adopt a kiosk (from the list annexed to the report) by Parish Councils be supported by the District Council in accordance with the BT Adopt a Kiosk Scheme

CH42 HOUSING INITIATIVES WORKING GROUP MINUTES

The Head of Housing Services submitted the minutes of the meeting of the Working Group held on 26 October 2009 for information.

RESOLVED that the minutes are noted.

CH43 SHELTERED HOUSING REVIEW UPDATE

The Committee considered a report updating Members on the meeting of the Sheltered Housing/Lifeline Task Group held on 22 October 2009 and received the report of the Housing Management Manager on the work and progress made with the review of the sheltered housing service.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Committee agree to Option 2 of Essex County Council's Supporting Peoples Options for funding of the Hub and Spoke Model.
- 2 the Committee agree for officers to further investigate the potential of partnership working with a different Control Centre and to look at current weekend working arrangements, with a view to providing a full response service for weekends and out of hours (7 days a week) for all sheltered and lifeline users.

CH44

TENANT FORUM MINUTES

The Committee received the report of the Housing Management Manager on the Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Forum on 14 September 2009, for information.

The Chairman of the Committee expressed his and the Committee's appreciation for the work of the Tenant Forum.

The Chairman also asked for details of void levels to be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

The meeting ended at 9.15 pm