

HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE held at 7.30 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 10 JANUARY 2002

Present:- Councillor R W L Stone – Chairman.
Councillors R P Chambers, Mrs C M Dean, Mrs S Flack,
R D Green, M A Hibbs and Mrs C M Little.

Also present:- Mrs J Bolvig-Hansen, Mr W Gladman and Mr J Grimshaw
(Tenant Panel Representatives).

Officers in attendance:- R Chamberlain, N Harris, B D Perkins, R M Secker
and P J Snow.

HH15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A J Ketteridge and
Mrs J Loughlin.

HH16 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2001 were received,
confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HH17 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute HH8 – Warden Best Value Review

Councillor Mrs Flack reminded Members that the Committee had previously
agreed to carry out security measures to reduce the likelihood of intrusions at
sheltered housing complexes in the district. She sought an assurance that
this work had been programmed and would be carried out. The Head of
Housing Services undertook to provide Members with an update of the current
position.

Councillor Green raised the question of doctors obtaining access to sheltered
complexes, especially during the hours of darkness. The Head of Housing
Services explained that local surgeries would usually be aware of entry
arrangements via a keypad entry system. If they were not, it was a relatively
easy matter to contact the relevant control centre who would be able to
facilitate entry.

In response to another question, he said that no security scheme was ever
100% safe and there was a reliance on people acting in a responsible
manner.

Councillor Hibbs asked that officers write to all local surgeries to discover
whether any difficulties were being experienced. The Head of Housing
Services agreed to make the necessary enquiries.

HEALTH BEST VALUE REVIEW

The Head of Environmental Services presented a report detailing the outcome of the Health Best Value Review and the draft action plan prepared by the Member Reference Group.

The Review Team had agreed to concentrate on external relations and partnership arrangements with organisations involved in health related activities, chiefly in the following areas:

- (i) working together with others to coordinate grant funding to benefit the health related voluntary and charity organisations;
- (ii) working together with others to coordinate grant funding to the providers of health related transport services;
- (iii) working together with others in areas identified in the Health Improvement Programme; and
- (iv) providing officer support to the Council's Member on the PCT Board.

In relation to grant funding voluntary and charity organisations, the proposal was for a single awarding body which would provide a coordinated approach and allow for a more strategic view to be taken. It was also considered that a coordinated approach to supporting transport provision would benefit patients and was particularly important in a rural area such as Uttlesford.

Members briefly discussed priorities identified in the Health Improvement Programme, including the scheme to allow GPs to refer patients to leisure facilities for specialist fitness care. The Committee noted that Councillor Mrs Menell had now been appointed as a member of the Uttlesford PCT Board.

It was apparent that officers were already forming links with health related organisations and that new opportunities for partnership working would continue to be explored.

RESOLVED that the Health Best Value action plan be approved as set out in the report to this meeting.

BUDGETS AND SERVICE PLANS 2002/03

The Principal Accountant presented the draft revenue estimates for final consideration by the Committee. Once approved they would be presented for inclusion in the overall budget report to the Resources Committee on 24 January.

The detailed figures presented to the Committee included savings already agreed as part of the Administration's budget strategy as well as internal charges. The Council had now resolved that service committees should seek further savings to assist in achieving the 2.5% Council Tax increase target. No additional savings or growth items had been identified. The position

therefore remained that total direct costs for this Committee were some £10,000 more than the target cash limit.

An indicative estimate had calculated an overall budget shortfall of £59,000 even with a 6% Council Tax increase. This did not take account of any growth items. The budget shortfall had now increased to £88,000 following decisions made by the Community and Leisure Committee.

The Head of Housing Services reported receipt of a letter from Wintercomfort stating that the charity intended to draw this project to a close in Uttlesford at the end of March. There was concern that the scheme had not proved a success and would, if continued, damage the credibility of Wintercomfort. The Committee had independently decided at the last meeting to withdraw financial support for this project.

Councillor Hibbs accepted that the rent and deposit guarantee scheme had not proved a success but felt there was still a role for organisations such as Wintercomfort. In his view, the Supporting People Initiative provided the opportunity to explore the possibility of reactivating a modified scheme involving Wintercomfort at some stage.

Councillor Mrs Flack queried the “other premises” costs under public conveniences. The Head of Environmental Services said that this figure included everything other than cleaning and agreed to send further information to Mrs Flack after the meeting.

The Leader proposed the adoption of the recommendation to agree the draft revenue estimates as presented but said that Members should continue to look for further possible savings.

RESOLVED that the Draft Revenue Estimates be agreed for inclusion in the overall budget report to the Resources Committee.

HH20

“DECENT HOMES” SURVEY

As part of the Government’s Decent Homes initiative, the Council was required to quantify the level of “non decent housing” in the housing stock as defined by Government standards and to plan and monitor progress towards making the stock comply with “decent” standards by 2010. The Head of Housing Services advised Members of the criteria used by the Government in defining decent standards and the factors within each criterion that were regarded as placing a dwelling into the “non decent” category. He explained that the guidance issued by the Government was very detailed and based on a series of strictly defined formulas. As a result it would be necessary to employ independent consultants to carry out a condition survey to the standard and within the time frame laid down. The work would have to be completed in the current financial year and was estimated to cost in the region of £30,000.

In response to a question, the Head of Housing Services said that tenants would be visited by appointment only and that the condition survey would involve an inspection of approximately 10% of the Council’s housing stock.

He agreed that the Council must be careful not to create the impression that all problems reported by tenants as part of this process could be resolved.

Councillor Green raised the question of tenants at a number of sheltered housing complexes who were physically constrained from moving from one floor to another. The Head of Housing Services expressed confidence that problems such as those mentioned at this meeting would be identified in the survey and fed into the maintenance programme in due course.

In response to another question, he advised Members that registered social landlords would be required to carry out stock condition surveys according to the same criteria imposed on local authorities but this would probably be spread over a longer time period.

RESOLVED that a decent homes condition survey be commissioned in the current financial year at an estimated cost of £30,000 to be funded out of the Housing Repairs reserve.

HH21

HOUSING STRATEGY STATEMENT 2002

The Head of Housing Services invited the Committee to decide how it wished the 2002 Housing Strategy Statement to be prepared. Members were reminded that the Council must prepare an annual Strategy Statement and 30 year Housing Business Plan. It was likely that preparation of the Strategy Statement would, this year, be essentially an updating process.

A decision was needed now because the Housing Strategy Working Group, which had been responsible for this process in previous years, was no longer in existence under the Council's new constitution.

RESOLVED that

- 1 a task group (to meet once only) be established consisting of Councillors Mrs S Flack, R D Green, M A Hibbs and R W L Stone and a tenant representative, to consider an updated draft housing strategy statement;
- 2 the task group be invited to take into account the "Supporting People" initiative.

HH22

CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF HOUSING CONFERENCE 2002

RESOLVED that Councillor R W L Stone be appointed to attend the Conference of the Chartered Institute of Housing to be held at Harrogate between 11 and 14 June 2002 and that, in principle, a tenant representative also be appointed to attend.

HH23

CHAIRMAN'S URGENT ITEMS

The Chairman advised members that there would be a special meeting of the Committee on Wednesday, 23 January, to set the level of housing rents in 2002/03.

In response to a question from Mrs Bolvig-Hansen, officers advised the meeting that distribution arrangements for Committee papers would be checked.

The meeting ended at 8.40 pm.