

**HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 30 MAY 2002**

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

Also present: Mr W Gladman, Mr J Grimshaw and Mr R Perry (Tenant Panel
Representatives).

Also present at the invitation of the Chairman:- Councillor Mrs J E Menell.

Officers in attendance: R Chamberlain, W Cockerell, M R Dellow, B D Perkins
and P J Snow.

HH38

APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs C M Dean and
A C Streeter, and Mrs J Bolvig-Hansen (Tenant Panel Representative).

Mrs J E Menell declared her interest in Item 8 on the Agenda as the Council's
representative on the Primary Care Trust.

HH39

MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2002 were received, confirmed
and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HH40

BUSINESS ARISING

**(i) Minute HH31 – Consultation Paper – Local Authority Health
Overview and Scrutiny**

Councillor M A Hibbs requested further information about the agreed
procedure for overview and scrutiny of NHS bodies by this Council.

It was understood that a framework would shortly be put in place by the
County Council and that this Council would have a role in this process to be
exercised by the relevant Scrutiny Committee. Further information would be
included in a report to the next Scrutiny Committee 1 meeting on 12 June.

(ii) Minute HH35 – Chairman's Urgent Items (Tenders)

The Chairman asked Members to note, in relation to the final paragraph of
this item, that details of tenders received since the last meeting were now
circulated to Members with the other Committee papers, but did not form part
of the agenda.

HH41

SUPPORTING PEOPLE - RESOURCES

The Head of Housing Services advised Members that additional resources estimated to be in the sum of £180,000 to £200,000 were likely to be made available to the Housing Revenue Account as part of the new Supporting People arrangements in 2003. One of the key elements of the changes would be that, from April 2003, housing support would be funded from the Essex wide pot of money available for the Supporting People project. The report was recommending that plans should be prepared for these additional funds to be spent on work in connection with bringing properties up to the required Decent Homes Standard.

Members expressed concerns about the source of the extra funding being made available. The Chief Accountant assured Members that the additional funding would be in place from the beginning of April next year, but it was still unclear to officers from where it was being provided.

Councillor R D Green asked that some of the money should be spent on upgrading accommodation for elderly tenants to provide stair lifts for tenants affected by immobility. Officers agreed to examine different options for helping elderly tenants in these circumstances, but advised the Committee that accommodation including communal stair areas, was not part of the Decent Homes Standard and could not therefore be incorporated into this particular programme. It might be possible to include provision for these areas in the planned maintenance programme and the Head of Housing Services undertook to examine this suggestion.

Members also asked to be kept updated on developments in relation to the Supporting People arrangements and requested that a report should be submitted to a future meeting when more certain information was available about the source of the funding. The Head of Housing Services assured Members that they would be kept informed of the process but that it might not be possible to ensure that full details of a proposed programme of works were supplied to Members at a Committee meeting before action had to be taken.

The Committee agreed, in conclusion, that the Council should proceed with all necessary arrangements to deliver the Decent Homes Standard, as required by the Government, and other improvements to the housing service as permitted under the new Supporting People arrangements.

RESOLVED that officers be authorised to submit proposals direct to the DTLR (or its successor body) to make any extra resources available as a revenue contribution to capital, for extra work to bring the housing stock up to the required Decent Homes Standard, subject to Members being advised of the programme being proposed for submission.

HH42

CODE OF PRACTICE ON THE DUTY TO PROMOTE RACE EQUALITY IN THE HOUSING SERVICE

A report was submitted advising the Committee of the Code of Practice issued by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) to promote race equality in the

housing service. It was noted that the various elements of the Code of Practice had gradually been introduced into the housing service, but that no action had been taken formally to adopt the original Code of Practice. Now was thought to be an appropriate time for the Council's formal position to be reviewed and to adopt the updated code issued by the CRE in December last year.

In response to a suggestion made by the Leader, the Committee agreed to adopt the Code, subject to the insertion of a reference to "black and all other minority groups".

RESOLVED that the Code of Practice in rented housing be adopted by the Council, subject to the insertion of a reference to "black and all other minority groups".

HH43

HOUSING NEEDS SURVEY 2002/03

The Committee received a report about the requirement to arrange for a Housing Needs Survey to be carried out during the current financial year. Agreement had already been obtained to provide a budget sum of £30,000 for this purpose from an earmarked reserve. The Survey was required in accordance with DTLR guidance as previously explained.

The range of tenders received for this work now indicated a cost between £50,000 and £53,000. It appeared there was no option but to agree a revised budget for this undertaking. The report also recommended that the annual provision for future surveys should be increased from £6,000 to £11,000 to take account of the likely additional costs associated with carrying out a survey every five years.

The Leader referred to the recent Best Value Challenge Event which had discussed how to progress housing needs surveys in future years and had taken the view that such surveys should be updated on a regular basis. Councillor Hibbs asked whether it would be feasible to undertake the survey in-house and to employ a member of staff on a contract basis to carry out the necessary work. He felt that such a solution might provide better value.

In response, the Head of Housing Services emphasised the importance of carrying out the proposed Housing Needs Survey to the necessary standard and within the timescale envisaged. He said that cost comparisons with the postal survey carried out in 1997 had not provided a valid comparison of costs because of the detailed nature of the information to be provided. For example, the new survey would involve conducting detailed personal interviews.

He emphasised that the Survey would incorporate 5% of all households in Uttlesford and not just those in local authority accommodation. Whether a consultant or Council officer was appointed, the DTLR would need to be satisfied that the information was being gathered on a wholly independent basis. There was also the factor of urgency, as the Survey would need to be completed by the autumn.

The Director of Community Services said that Members should draw a distinction between the proposal in the report and the Best Value Challenge Event held on the previous day. The Council had already established the principle that a survey should be conducted this year and this report was concerned primarily with the additional costs now identified over and above the £30,000 originally earmarked.

Members accepted that it would not be possible to plan properly the future provision of services without the Housing Needs Survey and that there did not appear to be any option other than to increase the budget provision to allow this matter to proceed.

RESOLVED that

- 1 arrangements to carry out the Housing Needs Survey at a revised budget of up to £53,000 be approved, subject to funding; and
- 2 the Resources Committee be requested to agree to make available an additional sum of up to £23,000 from reserves and to make provision for an annual increase from £6,000 to £11,000 to fund future surveys.

HH44

PLANNED MAINTENANCE BUDGET

The Head of Housing Services advised Members that tenders received for three central heating contracts included in the maintenance programme had exceeded the budget of £185,600 by a figure in excess of £95,000. It appeared that the present market for housing repairs was extremely volatile and that costs had risen sharply as a result.

It was also reported that a number of boiler replacements that were originally funded out of the ad-hoc repairs budget could now be packaged within the planned works programme as part of the new Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) arrangements. This would result in better value for money as a contractor could price for a number of replacement boilers over a period of time. It was therefore being proposed that a further £52,000 should be transferred to this budget. The Chief Accountant commented briefly about the effect of these arrangements on the transitional relief for negative housing subsidy.

RESOLVED that the planned central heating budget be increased to a sum of £333,000 within the overall budget.

HH45

TERTIARY CARDIAC CENTRE IN ESSEX

The Committee received a consultation document from the Essex Health Authority "Building a Better Health Service for People with Heart Disease in Essex". Comments on this document were being invited by 18 July 2002.

An NHS panel had recommended that Basildon and Thurrock General Hospitals should provide the proposed new specialist heart centre in

preference to Broomfield Hospital in Chelmsford. The consultation document acknowledged that some people from Uttlesford received treatment at Papworth Hospital in Cambridgeshire and stated that this could continue if this was their preference.

Councillor Mrs J E Menell attended the meeting at the Chairman's invitation as the Council's representative on the Primary Care Trust (PCT). A letter was circulated from Dr Nunn, Chairman of the Uttlesford PCT, addressed to the Essex Strategic Health Authority, stating the preference of the PCT for the new cardiac centre to be built at Broomfield rather than Basildon.

Members supported this view and it was

RESOLVED that

- 1 the establishment of a new tertiary centre in Essex be welcomed and that the Chelmsford option be supported in preference to Basildon; and
- 2 an assurance be sought that Uttlesford residents would continue to be able to attend Papworth Hospital if desired.

Councillor Mrs Menell also referred to information circulated to all Members of the Council by the Uttlesford PCT about efforts to raise funds to provide eight to 12 extra beds as part of the year of health campaign. It was agreed that the way in which this information was circulated was misleading as it did not make clear what was the purpose of the fundraising campaign and it would be better if the organisation was referred to as the Friends of Uttlesford PCT.

Councillor Mrs C A Bayley declared her interest in this item as a member of the PCT Fundraising Committee.

HH46

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of Exempt Information as defined in Paragraphs 3 and 8 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

HH47

HATHERLEY HOUSE AND COURT SAFFRON WALDEN

Councillor Mrs C M Little declared a pecuniary interest in this item and left the room for the duration of the discussion thereon. Councillors R P Chambers and Mrs S Flack declared their interest in this item in their capacity of County Councillor and remained present during the discussion and voting.

The Head of Housing Services advised Members of the current situation regarding negotiations with a private sector provider in relation to the area linking Hatherley House to the sheltered housing scheme at Hatherley Court. This was in pursuance of the County Council's policy to transfer a number of

its residential elderly persons' homes to the private sector on the basis that the new owners continue to provide a similar service for elderly people.

It was noted that the link area was owned by this Council as part of the sheltered housing scheme, but was extensively used by the County Council as part of a joint use arrangement for the elderly persons' home at Hatherley House. The link area contained the office, guest bedroom and common room, and kitchen of the sheltered scheme.

The report advised Members of a suggested course of action and the Committee was in agreement subject to the addition of certain safeguards.

RESOLVED that the Committee agree, in principle, to sell the link block at Hatherley, subject to the acceptance by the prospective purchaser that the facility will continue to provide for the elderly, and to certain other safeguards.

HH48

MAJOR ADAPTATION REQUEST

Councillor R D Green declared his interest in this item and took no part in the discussion or voting thereon.

The Head of Housing Services presented a report regarding a request for major adaptation work to be carried out to a house in Stebbing. The requested work was for a ground floor extension which would provide additional facilities for the benefit of the tenants and their family.

RESOLVED that the dwelling in Stebbing, identified in the report, be adapted by the addition of a ground floor extension at an estimated cost of £35,000.

The meeting ended at 8.55 pm.