

**HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 7 NOVEMBER 2002**

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

Also present:- Councillors Mrs D Cornell, Mrs E J Godwin, Mrs J E Menell and
R J O'Neill and Mr J Grimshaw (Tenant Panel Representative).

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

HH18 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R P Chambers,
A Dean and P G F Lewis.

HH19 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2002 were received,
confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HH20 BUSINESS ARISING

**(i) Minute HH14(ii) – Hatherley House and Court, Saffron Walden and
Minute HH17 – Chairman's Urgent Items**

Councillor Hibbs referred to a recent meeting between representatives of the
Town Council and the County Council's portfolio holder concerning the
financial implications for local authorities of proposed penalties for delays
caused by bed blocking in National Health hospitals. County Councillor Derek
Robinson, the portfolio holder, had stated that there would be serious financial
implications for Essex County Council if this proposal were to proceed.
Councillor Hibbs expressed concerns also in relation to the proposed transfer
of Hatherley House to the private sector and suggested that the Council
should work together with the County Council to resolve existing difficulties.

The Head of Housing Services advised Members that progress was slow and
this was proving extremely frustrating for officers of both the County and
District Councils.

The Chairman confirmed that the County Council's NHS Scrutiny Committee
was presently examining the problems caused by the bed blocking proposal.
Uttlesford was in a particularly difficult position because the remit of the
Scrutiny Committee was confined geographically to Essex and this did not
take account of residents undergoing treatment at Addenbrookes Hospital in
Cambridge and some other health treatment centres. Members were
concerned at the suggestion that figures relating to hospital patients in West

Essex did not take account of Addenbrookes and might be misleading as a result.

Councillor Mrs Menell referred to the work of the intermediate care team and said that it was hoped this work would soon be extended from the northern half of the district to cover the whole of Uttlesford. The work of this team was helping to ease the problems caused by bed blocking in this area. Councillor Mrs Cornell agreed that the joint funding arrangement had proved extremely successful and that figures relating to Addenbrookes were available. The Chairman invited Members to ensure that all available information was made available and said that she would be happy to pass on any reliable figures to the appropriate body.

Councillor Mrs Menell said that the new internal care ward would shortly be in operation and suggested that the Community Manager should be invited to explain to this Committee how the intermediate care system was operating within Uttlesford.

(ii) Minute HH15 – Housing Strategy Statement and 30 Year Housing Business Plan

Councillor Hibbs raised the reference in this Minute to the possibility of accelerating the programme for the replacement of asbestos. The Head of Housing Services replied that no information was available at this meeting but that the budget allocation for this item incorporated the identification and management of asbestos as well as arranging for its removal. However, any dangerous asbestos identified was removed as a matter of urgency. Councillor Green referred to unsafe structures in the garage area at the rear of Audley Road and officers agreed to investigate.

HH21

FUTURE MANAGEMENT OF THE COUNCIL'S HOUSING STOCK

The Chairman referred to the recent Housing Workshop at which officers had been asked to report on the financial, technical and managerial aspects of current housing issues and the possible impact of the Government consultation on capital housing receipts. In her introductory remarks, the Chairman stressed that Members of all political persuasions had the Council tenants' best interests at heart regardless of their preferred solution for the future management of the Council's housing stock.

Mr Grimshaw (Tenant Panel representative) expressed surprise that the Council had, at its recent meeting, discussed the possible transfer of the housing stock without tenants first being informed of this proposal. The Chairman reassured him that the motion submitted to that meeting had not been successful but even if it had been approved a transfer of stock application could not be made without the support and endorsement of the Council's tenants.

Councillor Mrs Dean referred to recent discussion of proposed amendments to the Housing Strategy Statement and Business Plan and said that the Council's current policy did not incorporate the possibility of a stock transfer taking place. That being so, she asked for clarification of the process for an

application to be made to the Government to place the Council on the list for a transfer to take place. The Head of Housing Services confirmed that the Housing Strategy Statement had now been submitted to Go-East and the Council's policy was as stated in that document. However, the opportunity would arise during the updating process for the strategy statement next year for that policy to be reviewed, if Members so wished.

Councillor Hibbs was concerned about how the updating of next year's Strategy Statement would proceed now that the Standing Housing Strategy Working Group no longer existed and the Best Value Review process would, by that time, be completed. The Head of Housing Services confirmed that a report would be submitted to the Committee in the early part of next year asking Members how they wished the Housing Strategy updating process to be carried out. One of the options for this could include the establishment of a time limited task group as was the case this year.

The Chairman asked the Tenant Panel Representative to indicate how the Tenant Panels would wish to be included both in this process and the consideration of other housing policy matters. She suggested that meetings could be arranged between members, officers and tenant panel representatives in different venues and on a more informal basis than was possible at meetings of this Committee. Mr Grimshaw said that he and the other tenant panel representatives would be delighted if this idea could be put into practice. He referred to the difficulty of recruiting younger and more active representatives and felt that joint liaison meetings of the kind suggested would help the tenants' views to be better represented.

The Director of Resources advised Members of the outcome of a meeting held earlier in the day in Westminster to consider the Government's proposals for the redistribution of capital receipts. The meeting had taken place to express the concerns of debt free authorities vulnerable to a sequestration of their assets in the way proposed by the Government.

The meeting had been attended by a large number of MPs of all parties and it was apparent that a number of Labour MPs were concerned about the implications of this proposal. The Government had received 134 responses to their recent consultation, 127 of which had expressed concerns about the proposed pooling of capital receipts. Present indications were that the Government intended to press ahead with its legislative programme following the Queen's Speech and that this was likely to include the clause relating to capital receipt pooling which had previously been included in the draft Local Government Bill published last Summer.

Such a proposal would be likely to have a tremendous impact on the provision of social housing in Uttlesford and the other areas affected. The Local Government Association had now accepted the case that the redistribution of capital receipts would have severe financial implications for those authorities affected and the Association's policy was now that clause 10 should be deleted. However, the view of those attending the meeting was that the Government would not listen to the arguments of the authorities concerned and the lobby group representing their interests now considered that the best prospects for amending or overturning the legislation now lay with the House of Lords.

Members supported the Director's view on the catastrophic effect such a policy would have on provision for local housing need. They were concerned that the Council was being penalised for its prudent financial management by being stripped of its capital assets. Uttlesford was deemed to be a wealthy area but the Government had acknowledged the need for more social housing and yet was not prepared to allow the Council to continue to provide for this need.

The Director of Resources said that it was ironic that the Council had been congratulated in the District Audit Management letter for good financial management but that the Government intended to penalise the Council financially for its prudence in being debt free.

In response to a question, the Head of Housing Services confirmed that it was not automatic that a local authority could be placed on the stock transfer list. It was a prerequisite in such cases for a great deal of technical and financial information to be provided first and it was understood that this process had been put on hold at the present time pending a review.

Councillor O'Neill asked how the Government intended to channel the pooled resources back into areas of housing need. The Director of Resources replied that the Government was still preparing the mechanisms for operating the scheme and it was presumed that resources would be provided to perceived areas of greatest need.

Councillor Mrs Little suggested that a letter should be sent to all MPs pointing out the implications of the Government's policy. The Director of Resources confirmed that regular briefings of MPs were already taking place through the lobby group to which the Council was now affiliated.

Members also referred to the difficulty of recruiting key workers in particular sectors of the economy because of the lack of affordable housing in the district. It was agreed that the supply of affordable housing would be likely to decline as a result of the Government's intentions being implemented.

Councillor Stone referred to a forthcoming meeting of the LGA's Housing Policy Review Group on 21 November and asked whether the Council intended to be represented. Councillor Mrs Bayley confirmed that she had been asked to attend already.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

HH22

DRAFT BUDGETS 2003/04

The Director of Resources presented a report outlining the Committee's initial draft revised estimates of direct costs and income for 2002/03, and estimates for 2003/04, prepared on the basis of existing approved levels of service. The figures had been prepared on the basis of projections, targets and priorities approved by the Council at its meeting on 22 October. He invited the Committee to give consideration to the detailed figures together with

associated savings proposals as the basis for preparing next year's budget and service plans.

In this context, it was noted that the indicative savings target of £5,000 had been achieved. The overall target expenditure of £729,000 could be met with a margin of more than £14,000.

Councillor Ketteridge referred to the unpleasant condition of the Hill Street public conveniences in Saffron Walden and asked the officers to comment upon a possible remedy.

RESOLVED

- 1 to note that the Committee's agreed target position had been met; and
- 2 that officers be directed to prepare appropriate service plans for 2003/04 and full budgets for consideration during the next cycle of meetings.

HH23

EXTENSION OF RESPONSIVE REPAIRS CONTRACTS

Councillor Hibbs declared a non-pecuniary interest in this item.

The Committee was advised that the Council had, in 1996, advertised and appointed approved contractors, after completion of the normal tendering process, for a number of repair contracts identified in the report. The contract was for an initial three-year period with provision for a two-year extension.

In 2000/01, as part of the first Housing Best Value Review, it had been decided to enter into a further negotiated extension of the contracts with these contractors. The contracts were now due to end on 31 March 2003. As the arrangement had worked well and had provided good value for money, it was envisaged that this process could be repeated in the future for the successful contractors and provision for this process had been incorporated in the revised Contract Standing Orders accordingly.

However, advice had now been received that, with regard to the specific contracts, it would be necessary to retest the market. A new tendering process would now require the specification to conform to European Union regulations. This would require specialist knowledge from an external source to prepare the specifications. Members were advised that the Legal Section did not currently have the capacity to incorporate this work. The result would be that the end of March deadline could not be met. The report suggested that the existing contracts be extended for a further six months, with a negotiated adjustment in prices, to allow for the necessary tendering work to be undertaken. Members were satisfied with the suggested arrangement.

RESOLVED that the contracts referred to in the report be extended until 30 September 2003, subject to a negotiated adjustment in prices, to allow for the necessary tendering documentation and processing to be undertaken.

HH24 **SALE OF LAND AT GREAT SAMPFORD**

Consideration was given to the sale of a building plot located at the rear of Robletts Villas, Great Sampford. Planning permission had been granted for the construction of a detached three-bedroomed house. The plot was not suitable for social housing use.

Members were advised that it was not possible to obtain permission for a pair of semi-detached dwellings on this plot owing to the existence of a tree preservation order. It was felt that the Council's position in this matter could best be protected by the inclusion of a restriction limiting the site to one dwelling only.

RESOLVED that the sale of a plot of building land at Great Sampford be agreed, subject to a price specified by the District Valuer and appropriate terms and conditions in accordance with Standing Orders, including a restriction limiting the site to one dwelling only.

HH25 **CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF HOUSING CONFERENCE 2003**

The Committee was invited to indicate whether it wished to be represented at this conference by a Member and tenant panel representative, as well as by the Head of Housing Services.

The Head of Housing Services also drew attention to a member conference at Ingatestone in December to consider the new supporting people arrangements. He asked that any Members who may be interested in attending this conference arrange to contact him in due course.

RESOLVED that

- 1 arrangements be made for a Member and tenant panel representative to attend the Chartered Institute of Housing Conference in 2003; and
- 2 Councillors Mrs C A Bayley and Mrs C M Dean, together with one other Member, attend the Supporting People Conference in December.

HH26 **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 item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 8 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

SALE OF LAND AT LITTLE EASTON

A report was submitted dealing with the suggested disposal of a non-standard Council property at Mill End, Little Easton. The dwelling had now become vacant and it was suggested that now would be an appropriate time to consider selling the cottage on the open market in its present condition. Members were advised that the Council would incur considerable expenditure to retain the cottage (which was a Grade II listed building) in a lettable condition.

RESOLVED that the sale of 7 Mill End, Little Easton proceed, subject to a price specified by the District Valuer and to appropriate terms and conditions in accordance with Standing Orders.

Councillor Hibbs asked if the officers would give consideration to moving towards a performance based tendering process. He had received comments from a number of contractors regarding their inability to tender for contracts because they were unable to comply with conditions requiring the use of material supplied by a specified manufacturer. The Head of Housing Services agreed to consider the matter.

The meeting ended at 9.05 pm.