

**HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES  
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 4 SEPTEMBER 2003**

Present:- Councillor C A Bayley – Chairman.

Councillors K R Artus, W F Bowker, S Flack, D W Gregory,  
B M Hughes, R M Lemon, A Marchant and V Pedder.

Also Present:- Councillor G Sell.

Tenant Representatives:- J Bolvig-Hansen and J Grimshaw.

Officers in attendance:- R Chamberlain, P O'Dell, I Orton, B D Perkins and  
P J Snow.

**HH12 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M A Hibbs and  
E W Hicks.

**HH13 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 June 2003 were received, confirmed  
and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**HH14 BUSINESS ARISING**

**(i) Minute HH3 – Hatherley House and Court, Saffron Walden**

The Head of Housing Services advised Members that, subject to final  
discussions about the separation of services, it appeared the agreement  
would be concluded in the near future. The Chairman asked that Members be  
kept informed of developing progress in this matter.

**HH15 HOUSING STRATEGY WORKING PARTY**

The Minutes of the meetings of the Housing Strategy Working Party held on  
11 July and 5 August 2003 were approved and adopted including the  
following recommendations:

Minute HSWP2 – Homelessness Strategy 2003-2008

Minute HSWP3 – 30-Year Housing Business Plan 2003

**HH16 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

The Performance Manager introduced a report regarding the intention to  
strengthen the monitoring and measurement of performance indicators across  
the whole range of the Council's services, as suggested by the District  
Auditor. This system was intended to build upon the more limited form of

performance management adopted two years ago and kept under review by the Corporate Management Team. A range of over sixty performance indicators already collected within the authority had now been identified to enable a comprehensive performance system to be adopted.

The report presented to the Committee incorporated an appendix setting out all of the indicators concerned including seven relating to housing services. The suggestion was to adopt a reporting method linked to a traffic light system and that these indicators would be reported on a quarterly basis.

Members indicated their agreement with the overall thrust of the report and the range of indicators selected for measurement. However, some concern was expressed about the use of a traffic light system in relation to those who may be colour blind or otherwise visually impaired.

Further options were already being explored and it was felt that a simple capital letter system to appear alongside the traffic light indicators would probably be sufficient to overcome any problems. The Performance Manager agreed to identify and put into practice the best method to supplement the traffic light system.

RESOLVED that:

- 1 the range of performance measures and targets identified in the report be agreed;
- 2 the traffic light system be supplemented by an agreed clear method of indication, taking into account the requirements of those suffering from colour blindness or other forms of visual impairment.

(Please note that the Committee agreed, under a later item, to ask the officers to consider incorporating an additional indicator measuring provision for the homeless).

HH17

## **ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL CONSULTATION REPORT “MEETING THE LONG-TERM NEEDS OF OLDER PERSONS IN ESSEX”**

The Head of Housing Services summarised the contents of a consultation paper received from Essex County Council relating to services for older people in residential care. The document referred to the Best Value Review of older persons services carried out in 2002 by the County Council. The Review expressed concern about the projected shortfall in domiciliary care provision, the shortage of residential/nursing home beds and the lack of specialist beds in some areas within the County. The review had recommended that each of the twelve remaining care homes operated by the County Council should be developed for special provision.

The document explained the County Council’s difficulties in meeting an improved standard in relation to the National Minimum Standard, originally scheduled for 2007. Projections had also been made for likely needs in providing residential beds until 2011.

Members were advised that 17 care homes had been transferred to the independent sector and that, following changes within these establishments, 230 extra beds had been provided, half of which were available to the County Council on a contractual basis. The consultation paper pointed out that a further 210 beds could be generated from this source within the 12 residential care homes still operated by the County Council. It was explained that the funding of these beds would be unlikely if the homes remained within the public sector but that the additional beds could be provided were the establishments to be outsourced to the independent sector. The consultation document stated that service users would still receive the same quality of service in this event.

Stanley Wilson Lodge in Saffron Walden was the one remaining County Council run establishment located in the Uttlesford district. It was reported that Saffron Walden Town Council had written opposing any disposal of Stanley Wilson Lodge but, in the event that the County Council decided that disposal was the only course, a lease arrangement would be preferable to outright sale.

Councillor Sell, who had been invited to attend this meeting, expressed particular concerns about the potential disposal of Stanley Wilson Lodge in view of the high standard of care available there both to the elderly residents and to those in receipt of day care provision. He said that standards of care were higher than those provided in the private sector and that the staff were upset and concerned for their future. He agreed with the stance adopted by the Town Council and said that leasehold should be viewed as a last resort only.

*Councillor Flack declared her interest as an Essex County Councillor and because she had taken part in discussions about the future of care homes within Essex.* She said that many existing residents were emotional about the prospect of change but previous transfers had been managed carefully and with no significant problems. The level of care at Redmond Lodge in Great Dunmow had been maintained to a satisfactory level since its transfer to the independent sector had taken place.

During the course of the debate, the majority of Members expressed similar views to those of Councillor Sell. There was widespread concern that the document was misleading because of a perception that Essex County Council had already determined its policy. The questions being posed in the consultation paper were also felt to be unclear and, to some extent, contradictory.

Members appreciated the problems faced by the County Council but felt that it would be more productive to seek a means of providing the additional accommodation required without transfer to the private sector taking place. One possible option was a direct transfer of the facilities to the Primary Care Trust (PCT) so that management of the facilities could continue within the public sector. It was decided that a letter would be sent to the County Council expressing the Council's strong concerns about the matters raised in this discussion.

RESOLVED that a response to the County Council's consultation paper on the future of residential care accommodation in Essex be sent in the following terms:

- 1 that the Council opposes the sale of residential homes to the private sector and, in particular, Stanley Wilson Lodge in Saffron Walden;
- 2 that the County Council considers how it can provide additional beds within its homes;
- 3 that, in the event that the County Council does transfer the homes, the first preference was for the transfer of existing residential care homes to the PCT;
- 4 that, in the event that Essex County Council does not achieve option 3 above, then transfer should be to leasehold and not freehold; and
- 5 that further discussion and consideration with the District Council needs to be given to day care services in the event of any transfer from the County Council.

HH18

## **HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**

The Head of Housing Services reported that the draft Homelessness Strategy had now been submitted to Go-East as required. A summary of the draft Strategy, as now agreed by the Housing Strategy Working Party, was circulated at the meeting.

He explained that a number of action points had been identified as part of the strategy and it was considered necessary, as a matter of urgency, to appoint a dedicated officer to deal with homeless provision on a much more proactive basis than had been the case previously. Uttlesford was the only local housing authority in Essex not to have a dedicated homelessness officer. As explained in the report, the funding of this post would be entirely covered by Government grant in the current financial year but the cost to the Council would progressively increase in future years.

Members made a number of editorial suggestions for changes to the strategy before it was finally agreed and submitted.

A number of Members commented that it was important to be able to demonstrate the difference made to provision for the homeless as a result of adopting a more proactive approach. It might be appropriate to adopt this aspect as an additional performance indicator so that real progress could be measured and the officers agreed to consider how this could be done.

Members also expressed the view that the title of homelessness officer could be improved upon and officers agreed to consider options for an alternative title before advertising the post.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 the Homelessness Strategy, as now amended, be recommended to the Council for formal adoption and submission to Go-East; and
- 2 the Resources Committee be recommended to establish the post of homelessness officer with immediate effect.

HH19

### **REVISED TENANT COMPACT**

The Committee received a report concerning the need to revise the Tenant Compact and to consider granting an allowance to the chairman of the tenant panel. It was considered that these changes would help to pave the way towards the election, by ballot, of a new tenant panel later in the year.

The draft revised Tenant Compact had already been considered and supported by a small group of tenant representatives from the existing panel. It was considered that a quarterly payment of £250 should be made to the chairman of the tenant panel commencing on 1 January 2004 to acknowledge the extra workload that was likely to result from the changes taking place. The cost of this would fall upon the Housing Revenue Account.

The tenant panel representatives explained that they had enjoyed a good working relationship with both officers and Members and that the new Compact should ideally be allowed to function for a period of three years before being reviewed. The Committee noted that the Tenant Compact had renamed the Tenant Panel to 'the Tenant Forum'.

Some concern was expressed that the forum might become unbalanced if a large number of nominations was received from a particular part of the district. One way to prevent this might be to consider limiting nominations on a geographical basis. However, officers advised that this could be impracticable and that it was important not to limit the opportunity for tenants to nominate and elect whomsoever they wished. The Committee accepted this viewpoint. The non-political nature of the tenant forum was also stressed as an essential element for the effective working of this new body.

RESOLVED that the revised Tenant Compact be approved and adopted incorporating the provision to award an agreed amount on a quarterly basis to the chairman of the Tenant Forum commencing on 1 January 2004.

HH20

### **ERECTION OF RADIO ANTENNA ON FLATS AT WAGON MEAD HATFIELD HEATH**

A request had been received from Hatfield Heath Parish Council for landlord permission to be granted for the erection of a radio antenna at Wagon Mead to enable access to Broadband Internet services. It was understood that this location was one of a number under consideration.

*Councillors Artus and Flack declared an interest in this item as members of the board set up to oversee this project and left the meeting during the consideration of this item.*

Councillor Lemon declared his interest as a member of Hatfield Heath Parish Council and took no part in the vote on this item.

It was understood that the siting of a radio antenna on the chosen location might need to be subject to planning consent. It was not yet known whether Wagon Mead would be the selected location.

After considerable discussion, the Committee agreed that it would support the project in principle subject to further consideration when further aspects of the proposal had been clarified.

RESOLVED that support be given, in principle, to the granting of landlord consent for the erection of a radio antenna at Wagon Mead, Hatfield Heath, provided the location concerned was finally selected, and subject to the adoption by this Committee of suitable terms and conditions, and to the granting of planning consent, if applicable.

HH21

## **POLICY PRIORITIES AND BUDGETS 2004/05**

The Financial Services Manager presented a report outlining the Council's proposed approach to general fund budget setting for 2004/05 within the context of the newly adopted Quality of Life plan. The report contained early proposals for budget amendment and areas for further research following meetings between the Leader of the Council, Chairman of Resources, Committee Chairmen and appropriate officers as previously agreed. The Resources Committee would issue further guidance to officers and committees following an updating of the Council's overall budget position at its meeting on 18 September. In the meantime, this Committee was being invited to comment on proposals included in the report and to give any other observations on its priorities and budgets.

The officers explained that the cost of the proposed homelessness officer was still being evaluated and would be reflected in future reports.

RESOLVED that the budget base position be noted and the listed budget review items for 2003/04 agreed; these would be considered further at the next meeting.

HH22

## **ARSON ATTACK AT LITTLE DUNMOW**

The Chairman agreed to the consideration of this item as an urgent matter. Councillor Gregory reported that a number of tenants' garages had been destroyed in an arson attack at The Moors, Little Dunmow. Members expressed great sympathy with any tenants affected by this incident and it was requested that further information should be circulated to Members, via the Members' Bulletin, when available.

The meeting ended at 9.10 pm.