

**HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES  
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 23 OCTOBER 2003**

Present:- Councillor C A Bayley – Chairman.  
Councillors W F Bowker, S Flack, D W Gregory, E W Hicks,  
M A Hibbs, B M Hughes, R M Lemon and A Marchant.

Also present:- Councillors M L Foley, A R Row and A M Wattebot.

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

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

**HH23 STATEMENT BY MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC**

Mrs B Thurgood, a tenant of one of the sheltered units at Vicarage Mead, Thaxted, made a statement about options for the refurbishment and/or redevelopment of the Vicarage Mead site. A copy of the statement is appended to these Minutes.

**HH24 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K R Artus and V Pedder.

**HH25 VICARAGE MEAD THAXTED**

The Head of Housing Services presented a report outlining a number of options for the future of the sheltered housing scheme at Vicarage Mead, Thaxted. The Committee had agreed at its meeting in June this year to ask officers to carry out a consultation and feasibility exercise and report back to this meeting.

The Vicarage Mead complex consisted of 22 sheltered units within the main building together with seven bungalows. Eighteen of the flats were bed-sit units with the tenants sharing bathroom facilities. Bed-sit accommodation of this type had become unpopular and had proven hard to let. Lettings had been temporarily suspended in June and eleven of the 22 flats were currently void. There was no waiting list for Vicarage Mead and officers had been unable to secure any real interest in letting the vacant units.

Mrs Thurgood had suggested in her statement that sponsorship should be obtained to allow for advertising to be provided. The Head of Housing Services advised that the Council's policy was to allocate according to housing need and that advertising was relevant only when that need had been exhausted. Nevertheless, some advertising had been carried out previously in respect of Vicarage Mead but no demand could be generated for the units concerned.

The sheltered support services at Vicarage Mead were now funded by the Essex Supporting People Commissioning Body. The Supporting People regime required that service reviews were carried out over a three-year period to ensure value for money. The sheltered housing service in Uttlesford was scheduled to be reviewed in early 2005. Officers had expressed concern that funding for the service could be adversely affected because of the high level of vacancies at Vicarage Mead.

There was also a requirement for all councils to ensure that all of the housing stock reached the "Decent Homes Standard" by 2010. The specific problems relating to Vicarage Mead were considerable as the dwellings failed on almost all of the decent home elements. It was noted that the bungalows were also in need of some work to achieve the standard.

A further factor was that the Housing Needs Survey commissioned in Autumn 2002 had identified as one of its key recommendations the development of "extra care" accommodation for the frail elderly population. The report had therefore tried to take account of how this recommendation could be addressed in relation to Vicarage Mead.

Extensive consultation had taken place with most of the existing tenants at Vicarage Mead, although some tenants had refused to become involved in the consultation process. The main concerns of residents, as expressed during the consultation, were set out in the report together with relevant officer comments. A particular concern was that residents would have to leave the site during the course of any refurbishment work. The Head of Housing Services commented that, depending on the option chosen by Members, it could not be guaranteed that alternative accommodation could be provided specifically in Thaxted.

In the event of a proposed transfer to a Registered Social Landlord (RSL), the Committee noted that good practice required that a tenants' ballot should be held. However, the Secretary of State had the power to take a decision on regeneration of the site even if the majority of tenants opposed transfer.

Finally, the Head of Housing Services summarised briefly the five options presented in the report as follows:-

#### **Option 1**

- Take no action at present and review at a later date after the Supporting People service review.

#### **Option 2**

- Limited work be carried out to the empty units and to other units as they became empty in an attempt to make them easier to let.

#### **Option 3**

- The Council to explore carrying out major refurbishment to the Vicarage Mead complex only (that is, excluding the bungalows and the day centre).

#### **Option 4**

- Pursue the transfer of the Vicarage Mead complex to a RSL for a refurbishment scheme similar to option 3.

#### **Option 5**

- Redevelop the whole site in liaison with a specialist RSL, to provide a modern sheltered housing/extra care facility within the District.

*In opening the discussion, Councillor Flack referred to the recent discussions about the proposed disposal of Hatherley House in Saffron Walden and declared her interest as a County Councillor. She said that it would be a retrograde step and set an unwelcome precedent to outsource a scheme containing vulnerable elderly people to a RSL.*

Councillor Hibbs was sympathetic with the views expressed by Councillor Flack, but said that the Council did not have the financial capacity to refurbish the site without working with a RSL. He feared there was a misunderstanding about what the Council was trying to achieve, as there was no wish to cause upset or inconvenience. It had never been the intention to dispose of the site and no discussions had taken place with developers. He expressed the view that no-one would be moved from the site against their wishes and proposed that officers should be asked to investigate further options 3 and 4 in the report, in full consultation with tenants at Vicarage Mead. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Bowker.

In response to a question, the Head of Housing Services confirmed that the future utilisation of housing capital receipts would not become clear for several weeks and part or all of the additional pooled resources referred to in the report could be channelled back to the government. Vicarage Mead would have to compete for any extra resources with a number of other housing related projects and it would be for Members to decide their priorities at the relevant time.

There was some discussion about whether the Council had already decided to rule out moving the tenants at Vicarage Mead in the event of any major works. The general view was that no decision had yet been taken, but Members were at liberty to so decide at this meeting. If they did so, that would clearly limit the options available for the site to be redeveloped.

Councillor Foley was particularly anxious to ensure that any uncertainty the tenants felt could be laid to rest by the Council making it clear they had no intention of moving tenants from the site.

Councillor Wattebot supported this view and reported also that Thaxted Parish Council did not wish to see tenants moved, even temporarily, to other parts of the District.

Other Members expressed concern that the level of disruption caused by major refurbishment works at Vicarage Mead would create the pressure for tenants to be moved, but the Chairman pointed out that a similar scheme had

been successfully carried out at Oakroyd House, Great Dunmow with the tenants being rehoused within the complex.

Councillor Hibbs said that he wished to amend his proposal to add a stipulation that no tenant would be asked or required to leave Vicarage Mead as a result of any proposed refurbishment work. The amendment was duly seconded by Councillor Bowker.

The proposal, as now amended, was put to the vote and carried.

RESOLVED that

- 1 officers be asked to investigate further options 3 and 4 in the report, in full consultation with tenants at Vicarage Mead, and a progress report brought back to the next meeting of the Committee; and
- 2 no tenant would be asked or required to leave Vicarage Mead as a result of any proposed refurbishment work.

HH26

#### **ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING**

The meeting was then adjourned to allow a presentation to be made by Stephen Davies about the application by Addenbrooke's NHS Trust for NHS Foundation Trust Status. Mr Davies gave a full and informative presentation about the application and the reasons for it and the local consultation process currently underway to consider its implications. He answered a number of questions from Members about the way Foundation Trust Status was expected to operate and the effect that would have on other health care providers in the District and the services provided for NHS patients generally.

The Chairman thanked Mr Davies for his presentation and reminded Members that a public meeting was due to be held at Saffron Walden Town Hall on Tuesday 4 November 2003.

The meeting then resumed following the short adjournment for the presentation by Mr Davies.

HH27

#### **CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED APPLICATION BY ADDENBROOKE'S FOR NHS FOUNDATION TRUST STATUS**

Members had before them a report setting out the considerations concerned in the application by Addenbrooke's NHS Trust for NHS Foundation Trust Status and seeking Members' views. The Committee also had before them the views of the Uttlesford Primary Care Trust (UPCT) on the implications for residents in the District of this application.

The report explained that Addenbrooke's Hospital had been awarded a three star rating, the maximum possible, for three consecutive years and had been invited to apply for Foundation status once the necessary legislation had been introduced. The hospital also had close ties with Cambridge University and

the Medical Research Council and was a recognised regional, national and international centre for a range of specialist services.

If successful in its application for Foundation status, Addenbrooke's would be managed through a board of governors, which in addition to overseeing the activities of the hospital would also appoint non-executive directors to the board of directors. The proposal was that membership of the Foundation Trust would come from three constituencies. These were defined as patients and the public, staff, and partner organisations.

Mr Davies had already explained in his presentation that NHS Foundation Trusts were a new type of organisation in the process of being enabled by legislation currently passing through Parliament. The Trusts would be fully part of the NHS, but would have greater freedom to run their own affairs. The report set out in greater detail what that would involve in relation to the services provided at Addenbrooke's Hospital.

It was noted that, broadly speaking, only the northern half of the Uttlesford District was included within the proposed membership area for the Foundation Trust and the wards concerned were defined in the consultation document issued by Addenbrooke's NHS Trust.

The Acting Chief Executive had noted the matters of principal concern raised by Members during the presentation by Mr Davies and the Committee agreed that these main concerns should be put forward as the Council's formal views in response to the consultation document. It was, therefore,

RESOLVED that the following comments be sent to Addenbrooke's NHS Trust regarding the application for Foundation Trust Status:

- 1 it was not transparently clear to the Council what the benefits to the community would be of achieving Foundation Trust Status;
- 2 there was some concern about the effect on the recruitment and retention of staff at Saffron Walden Community Hospital, in particular, as a result of the application proceeding; and
- 3 it was unclear how the nomination process would operate for two representatives to be appointed from the nine local authorities included within the membership area.

HH28

## **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2003 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**BUSINESS ARISING****(i) Minute HH14 – Hatherley House and Court, Saffron Walden**

The Head of Housing Services reported that the agreement for the disposal of Hatherley House had still not been concluded, but the matter was expected to be referred to Essex County Council's cabinet in the near future.

**(ii) Minute HH17 – Essex County Council Consultation Report  
“Meeting the Long Term Needs of Older Persons in Essex”**

*Councillor Flack declared her interest in this item as a County Councillor.*

It was reported that a letter had now been received from the Head of Community Care of Essex County Council confirming that the County Council had now agreed to proceed with the disposal, by sale, of remaining residential care homes, including Stanley Wilson Lodge in Saffron Walden.

Members noted the County Council's intention with regret and felt there was a lack of clarity in the letter from the Head of Community Care about the intentions of the County Council, particularly in relation to the future of day care facilities. It was agreed that a further letter be sent to the County Council expressing these concerns.

RESOLVED accordingly.

**(iii) Minute HH18 – Homelessness Strategy**

Councillor Flack asked officers to confirm that the post of Homelessness Officer, now referred to as “Housing Support Officer”, was fully funded for the next two years as stated at the Council Meeting on 14 October 2003. The Financial Services Manager confirmed that the post would be fully funded in the present financial year, but that, over a two-year period incorporating 2004/05, there was expected to be a small shortfall in the ODPM grant provided.

**(iv) Minute HH19 – Revised Tenant Compact**

The Head of Housing Services reported that 14 candidates had been nominated for the ten places available on the reconstituted tenant forum and it had been anticipated that an election would take place. However, four candidates had subsequently withdrawn their candidature and the ten remaining candidates had been elected unopposed. He felt the Committee should congratulate itself for the bold strategy it had embarked upon and that the decisions taken at the last meeting had resulted in some new members.

The Chairman thanked the officers for their hard work in establishing the new tenant forum and congratulated the successful candidates on their election.

Mrs Bolvig-Hansen confirmed that the four candidates who had withdrawn would continue to serve on a Thaxted community group and that the tenant forum would continue to liaise with this group.

HH30      **HOUSING STRATEGY WORKING PARTY**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Strategy Working Party held on 11 September 2003 were approved and adopted including the following recommendation:

**Minute HWP4 – Housing Strategy Statement 2004-2007**

Although it was possible for the Committee to approve the recommendation about the Housing Strategy Statement in principle, it was noted that detailed comments on the document had not yet been received from GO EAST and there would be a need for a special meeting of this Committee to take place immediately before the Council meeting on 16 December 2003 to approve the final document. This was agreed.

HH31      **POLICY PRIORITIES AND BUDGETS 2004/05**

Members received a report outlining the Committee's initial draft General Fund Revised Estimates of direct costs and income for 2003/04 and estimates for 2004/05, prepared on the basis of existing approved levels of service. The report had been prepared against the background of the Council's difficult financial position for next year and also the Council's decision, taken earlier this year, to set an indicative budget target equating to a 7.5% Council Tax increase. The report had also taken account, wherever possible, of the contribution each Committee could make to the Quality of Life Plan. It was noted that the Resources Committee had given particular emphasis to the need for a robust approach to increasing income from fees and charges.

The report included details of a number of variations, both in the revised budget and in the estimates for next year. The Financial Services Manager invited Members to consider, in particular, the charging issues contained in the report concerning pest control income and income from Stansted Airport.

The Committee considered a number of options in relation to the pest control service. There was no support for the cessation or externalisation of the service and Members agreed that the current arrangements should continue with an increase in the basic charge from £39 to £45. This would probably yield an extra £3,000 per annum.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer said there appeared to be no scope for further income to be generated at Stansted Airport as BAA had indicated it would not provide further funding for either existing or further independent noise monitors.

Reference was made to the need, identified in the recent Housing Needs Survey, to develop "extra care" facilities in the District for the frail elderly population. The Housing Services Manager agreed that this issue had been clearly flagged up in the document and would need to be addressed at some point in the future. The provision of extra care facilities would be fed into the Commissioning Body's strategy for Essex.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 the revised 2003/04 and draft 2004/05 budgets be approved and submitted to the Resources Committee for comment;
- 2 the basic charge for the pest control service be increased from £39 to £45 and that the current discount arrangement be retained; and
- 3 officers be instructed to prepare, in the light of guidance to be issued by the Resources Committee on 20 November 2003, service plans and draft budget proposals for consideration at the next meeting of this Committee.

**HH32 LISTENING LUNCH WITH HOUSING STAFF**

The Chairman agreed to the consideration of this item as an urgent matter. She had floated the idea of holding a listening lunch with housing staff so that Members could gain a closer understanding of the housing service and the demands on staff. It was agreed to go ahead with this event on the basis that it would be as informal as possible and that the Meals on Wheels service would be asked to provide for the catering.

**HH33 HOUSING WORKSHOPS**

The Chairman agreed to the consideration of this item as an urgent matter. The Financial Services Manager proposed to Members that two basic workshops should be held on the preparation of the budget book between 3.00 pm and 5.00 pm and 7.00 pm and 9.00 pm on Monday 1 December 2003. There was a possibility that a planning workshop had already been arranged for that day and it might be necessary to rearrange the date.

It was also proposed to have two similar workshop sessions on 15 January 2004 on the key changes in housing and capital finance which would probably be known by that date.

The Acting Chief Executive asked whether it was necessary to hold two separate sessions for each workshop and Members were asked to indicate whether they considered that both sessions would be supported. It was agreed that the officers should be allowed the discretion to organise the appropriate number of sessions depending on the likely demand for each once invitations had been issued.

**HH34 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

RESOLVED that under Section 100 A (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 7, 8 and 10 of Part I of Schedule 12 of the Act.

**HH35 LAND SALES**

The Committee was advised of three requests to purchase Council owned land at Butchers Pasture, Little Easton; South Road and Four Acres, Saffron Walden; and Mount Drive and Manor Road, Stansted. The officers had advised in the report that it might be prudent to maintain ownership of the two plots in Saffron Walden and Stansted to protect the Council's future interests. Members agreed with the officers' advice.

RESOLVED that the Council proceeds with the sale of land at Little Easton, subject to valuation by the District Valuer, but that the sale of land at South Road/Four Acres, Saffron Walden and Mount Drive/Manor Road, Stansted be not proceeded with.

**HH36 ADAPTATION OF A BUNGALOW IN GREAT CHESTERFORD**

The Chairman agreed to the consideration of this item as an urgent matter. At its meeting in June, the Committee had approved a request for major adaptation work to be carried out to a two bedroom Council bungalow in Great Chesterford. The lowest tender for this work to be carried out exceeded the original estimate by a total of £19,000 and it was a requirement of Financial Standing Orders that Members agree to accept the lowest tender before work could proceed. The officers were confident that any shortfall in budget could be found from within existing budgets.

RESOLVED that the additional costs of carrying out this work, as reflected in the lowest tender received, be approved, as required by Standing Orders.

The meeting ended at 10.00 pm.

**STATEMENT TO THE HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE  
23 OCTOBER 2003 BY MRS B THURGOOD**

I have been asked by the residents of Vicarage Mead to speak on their behalf.

We fully understand the problems faced by the Council, but feel that our problems are being ignored. In fact, as human beings, we seemingly are being completely discounted in this equation, and are being bulldozed into a situation, which we find quite unacceptable. We do NOT believe that there has been "extensive advertising" of the accommodation, as we have been told, nor do we believe that sufficient effort has been made to consider any alternatives. Vicarage Mead is a prime site for development, and it is becoming clear that this is the foremost consideration, particularly as there are, to our knowledge, at least two development companies who are actively interested in its acquisition. We are also aware that disposal of the site is being considered as an easy option.

One thing, which is being cited as a cause of lack of tenants, is that those in bed-sitters have to share communal bathing facilities, but this could easily be remedied by the installation of showers in the present bathrooms. This would not be a huge expense, since the whole job could be done for around £30,000. Has this been considered? On the credit side, however, Vicarage Mead has the best facilities of any similar complex in Essex, and any move would result in a considerable drop in the standard of living of the residents. Even in the short term, this would cause hardship for frail, elderly people most of whom are well over 80 years of age, and have serious physical handicaps, such as severe mobility problems, blindness and diabetes. The extra facilities and the communal care provided by the residents themselves, makes a good quality of life possible, which would be quite impossible in any other place. This is the reason why none of the present residents will be leaving Vicarage Mead voluntarily.

We are not just a collection of aged individuals. We are a well organised supportive family and to disperse that family even for a short time, would result not only in some having to go into full-time care, but also cause a great deal of mental and physical suffering. We would ask that, during your deliberations, you take all these facts into consideration.

The extra facilities at Vicarage Mead which make for such a good quality of life include:-

- 1 Easy access to the surgery and sympathetic and knowledgeable care from the doctors and nurses;
- 2 The delivery of prescribed medicines by the local chemist when necessary;
- 3 The delivery of groceries, which can be ordered by phone;
- 4 The Community Bus, which transports from door to door on Fridays, which is vital for those with mobility problems;

- 5 The Day Centre, where mid-day meals are provided, also social events, on site;
- 6 An active, financially self-supporting Social Club at Vicarage Mead, which organises coffee mornings (very well supported), outings, entertainments, afternoon teas and other social activities;
- 7 Library in the lounge which is changed every two months;
- 8 Jigsaws which are an ongoing social activity in the lounge, shared by many;
- 9 Hairdresser, who visits weekly and by appointment;
- 10 Weekly delivery of fresh eggs;
- 11 The post box, emptied daily;
- 12 Fish and chip van, weekly.