

**EXTRAORDINARY MEETING of the HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE  
held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at  
8.00 pm on 2 FEBRUARY 2004**

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

Also present:- J Bolvig-Hansen and J Grimshaw (Tenant Forum  
Representatives).

Officers in attendance:- R Chamberlain, M R Dellow, P O'Dell, B D Perkins  
and M T Purkiss.

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**DRAFT HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNTS AND RENT SETTING 2004/05**

The Chief Accountant presented a detailed report explaining the background to the draft estimates for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and inviting the Committee to determine rent levels for 2004/05, in the context of the statutory requirements for rent restructuring and convergence (“formula rents”). The report also gave consideration to major changes in the treatment of HRA rent rebates and the HRA capital framework.

It was explained that the figures presented with the report demonstrated that a rent increase for 2004/05 based on the ODPM's expected “3.96% plus or minus an eighth” should produce an average £2.64 per week and a level of income sufficient to increase the HRA capital programme to meet government expectations. The recommended increase was about 50p per week more on average than last year. It was pointed out that officers were not recommending any increase to current levels of service charges to tenants, except as needed for the “Supporting People” charges.

The Committee noted that prior to its meeting, a meeting of the Tenant Forum had been held where the content and recommendations of the report were considered. Mrs Bolvig-Hansen then read a statement on behalf of the Forum. The statement read “after deliberation with Members of the Forum, we would like to express our disappointment with the short amount of time we have had to discuss the document before submitting our approval to Council. We do understand that there was a hold up due to sickness in the officer's department which caused some delay.

However, we would like to point out that it would have been at least considerate of those who chose this date to have contacted either myself or the Tenant Participation Officer to ask if that would be convenient for the Forum.

We feel also the setting of this date has been somewhat cavalier as the Forum were not consulted leaving little time for discussion. It is felt we should have had more deliberation time. For us, the tenants, the rent setting is the most important part of our yearly tasks.

In the coming year, we shall be expected to looking at bringing on board an Independent Tenant Advisor. We would never thrust upon the officers and councillors at short notice such important decisions. We, the Forum, do consider the rent setting equally as important as it affects some 2,900 tenants”.

Councillor Bayley apologised on behalf of the Council.

Mrs Bolvig-Hansen then concluded that the Forum had decided to accept what was recommended in the report, but felt that there could be an increase in garage rents.

Councillor Flack said that she supported the recommendations but asked that in future more information should be provided about internal charges and how they were allocated. The Financial Services Manager accepted these points and said that the new financial management computer system and the introduction of zero based budgeting would provide an opportunity to explain these charges more clearly. He also suggested that a member workshop be held to consider and explain internal charges.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that the suggestion of deferring any increase in charges for common services would not cause problems as the amounts were not significant.

Councillor Hibbs considered that it was important to introduce a programme for the replacement of asbestos roofs for garages, but understood there was no budget for this item. He said that an increase in garage rents would help fund this and he said that he understood that an increase of £1 would bring in an annual budget of approximately £27,000. The Head of Housing Services confirmed that there were not current problems with damaged asbestos garage roofs and suggested that an assessment needed to be made of what needed to be done. After further discussion, the Committee

RECOMMENDED that the draft HRA estimates as presented, reflecting the ODPM expectations for 2004/05 be accepted on the basis that any effect on its further decisions below would be reflected in the published budget book:-

- A weekly dwelling rent increase of 3.96% plus or minus one eighth of the resulting difference from the ODPM formula rent for 2004/05 limited so that no tenant shall have an increase exceeding 3.3% plus £2.
- Supporting People current weekly charges to tenants of £13.94 for warden services and £3.09 for lifeline services be increased from April 2004 in accordance with the contract with the Commissioning Body.
- Protection be likewise increased against the “un-pooled” £8.38 element of the warden services charge for all those tenants at 31 March 2003 ineligible for grant assistance under “Supporting People” form April 2004.
- Heating charges be not increased from April 2004.

- Garage rents be increased by £1 per week from April 2004 and the revenue be ring fenced for repairs and replacement of asbestos garage roofs.
- Consideration of new charges for common services at flats be deferred until 2005/06.

The meeting ended at 8.25 pm.