

**Committee:** Health and Housing  
**Date:** 26 February 2004  
**Agenda Item No:** 4  
**Title:** Audit of the Imported Food Service by the Food Standards Agency  
**Author:** Geoffrey Smith (01799) 510582

### **Summary**

- 1 An audit of the Imported Food Service provided by the Commercial Team within Environmental Services was carried out by the Food Standards Agency during September 2003 and their final audit report was issued in December 2003. This report recommends the adoption of the draft action plan attached.

### **The Imported Food Service**

- 2 The Commercial Team within Environmental Services provides an inspection service for imported foods that enter the country (and therefore the European Union) via Stansted Airport. As such this is the frontline service for the prevention of the importation of human or animal health related diseases such as foot and mouth. There are two parts to the service, one that controls the import of Products of Animal Origin such as meat products, fish, dairy products etc that are inspected via the Border Inspection Post and the second that controls other types of imported food products not of animal origin, such as fruit and vegetables, that are dealt with through the cargo handling sheds.
- 3 The audit covered the second part of the service relating to the importation of Products Not Of Animal Origin (PNOAO) and the controls implemented by the service.

### **The Food Standards Agency**

- 4 The Food Standards Agency is a Government body set up in 1999, and has as one of its remits to oversee the implementation of food safety controls for imported food by Port Health and Local Authorities. In the wake of various scares involving the importation of illegally imported meat, the Agency introduced a step change approach to improving imported food controls throughout the UK. Part of this change involved an audit of the existing arrangements for PNOAO being implemented by Local Authorities. The audit at Stansted was the first full audit to be carried out by the Agency in the country.

## The Audit Report

- 5 A copy of the executive summary of the report is given below and an Action Plan to address the report's recommendations is attached at Appendix 1. A copy of the full report was placed in the Members Room following publication.
- 6 In brief the principal finding was that the Service needs to move from a reactive basis whereby we rely on information principally from the Importers or the cargo handlers, regarding food consignments arriving in the country to a more proactive service led by flight arrival information, the targeting of high risk flights from countries outside the EU and random, unannounced inspections of the handling sheds for undeclared food products.
- 7 The implications of this re-focussing of the Imported Food Service will require additional time and effort by the team of Environmental Health Officers involved. Potentially there will be a reduction in the number of inspections of low risk food consignments and the charges recovered thereby. Overall the impact of these changes should be neutral in respect of staff resources.

## Executive Summary

- 8 The following is the Executive Summary of the Audit.

- 2.1 *"The Authority was dealing with a relatively low, but growing throughput of non-animal origin foods (NPOAO) at London Stansted Airport. The Authority reported that all consignments notified to the Service by the Airport cargo handlers were examined in accordance with the Authority's policy of 100% checks. These products were typically high quality prepared fruits and vegetables. No food detentions, rejections, food sampling or formal actions had been deemed necessary by the Service over the 2 years preceding the audit.*
- 2.2 *The Service's arrangements required the involvement of a range of officers on a 'call-down' rota in order to provide 24 hour/7 day imported food inspection cover at the Airport. Although the rota included some officers without a food specialism or full qualifications, the Service's documented authorisation procedures set out clearly defined authorisation levels and the limits of officers' individual powers.*
- 2.3 *The control system's effectiveness was built upon the Authority's ability to identify all food consignments arriving at the Airport. However, the Service was entirely reliant upon the cargo handling agents reporting any foods they received. There were no effective mechanisms in place to routinely verify that the information received from commercial interests was complete, or to quantify any shortfall.*
- 2.4 *The controls operated by the Authority required comprehensive, up to date procedural guidance and access to all relevant reference texts to enable all officers on the rota to respond in a consistent and informed manner. The Authority was not aware of the Airport's status as a designated port for receiving some categories of high risk foods and*

*the relevant official control requirements were not available from the Service's reference library.*

*2.5 There was no internal monitoring to ensure that officers were acting in a consistent and effective manner, other than for a 6 month induction training period. The Service's records also required more detailed information to be logged in order to serve as a basis for effective internal monitoring and to provide adequate consignment traceability."*

- 9 The draft Action Plan has been prepared so as to address all the issues raised in the Audit report. It has been presented to the Food Standards Agency and accepted by them as meeting the report's recommendations.

RECOMMENDED that Members adopt the draft Action Plan attached.

Background Papers:- Food Standards Agency Audit Report of the Imported Food

Service (non-animal origin products) at London Stansted Airport 9 –11 September 2003.

**ACTION PLAN FOR UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Audit date: 9 – 11 September 2003**

<b>IMPROVEMENTS PLANNED</b>	<b>BY (DATE)</b>	<b>TO ADDRESS (RECOMMENDATION INCLUDING STANDARD PARAGRAPH)</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
Review the existing Service Plan and revise as necessary for 2004/05.  Submit revised plan for Member approval.	31.02.04  31.03.04	3.1.5 (i) Develop, document and implement a Service Plan that addresses imported food control arrangements in accordance with the Service Planning Guidance. The Service Plan should be submitted to the relevant member forum for approval. [The Standard – 3.1].	In progress
Carry out an annual performance review against the Service Plan.  Document and submit the review for member approval.  Address any variances in the 2005/06 plan.	30.04.05  30.06.05  30.06.05	3.1.5 (ii) Carry out an annual performance review against the Service Plan. Document the review and submit it for Member approval. Ensure that any variance in meeting the Service Plan is addressed in the subsequent year's service arrangements. [The Standard 3.2 & 3.3].	To be carried out in accordance with the relevant timescales.
Implement and maintain a document control system.  Ensure current legislation and guidance is available.	31.03.04  31.03.04	3.1.20 Set up, implement and maintain a document control system. The system should ensure that up to date copies of all relevant legislation and official guidance are available and that the internal policies and procedures for imported food control are updated to include all relevant guidance and references. [The Standard – 4.1 & 4.2].	In progress
Provide a lockable fridge/freezer.  Provide food sample receipts, labels and tapes/labels for marking.	31.03.04  31.03.04	3.1.33 (i) Ensure that all the necessary facilities and equipment are provided to permit all activities associated with the Service to be carried out. [The Standard – 6.1].	Completed  Completed
Calibrate the data logger and thermometer probes and include in calibration procedure.	31.03.04	3.1.33 (ii) Review and revise the calibration procedure to ensure that it covers the arrangements for calibrating the data logger and thermometer probes. [The Standard – 6.2].	Completed

Review the voluntary charging system and seek opinion on legal basis.	Completed	3.2.13 (i) Review the practice of levying charges for checks on consignments of NPOAO imported foods, with particular regard to the legal basis for this arrangement. [The Standard – 12.1].	The advice of the Councils solicitor is that S.111 of the Local Government Act 1972 provides a legal basis for the Authorities voluntary Imported Food charges.
Implement a programme of random periodic checks of cargo sheds to identify any undeclared consignments.	31.03.04	3.2.13 (ii) Ensure that effective systems are in place to enable the Authority to identify all food consignments arriving at the Airport and to take appropriate action as necessary. [The Standard – 12.1].	In progress Para reference: 3.2.7. There are only 5 actual cargo-handling companies. The other 11 are agents only.
Review and revise the sampling policy to include imported food on a risk assessment basis and sampling for analysis.	31.03.04	3.2.13 (iii) Review and revise the sampling policy and procedures as necessary to ensure that sampling contributes to an adequate and effective risk based control system for imported foods. These documents should also be expanded to include the arrangements for sampling for analysis. Implement the revised sampling policy. [The Standard – 12.3, 12.4 and 12.5].	Completed
Implement a revised sampling programme.	01.04.04		Completed
The draft Food Safety Enforcement Policy has been withdrawn.	Completed	3.2.18 (i) Finalise the draft Food Safety Enforcement Policy and ensure that it is readily available to the public and food businesses. [The Standard – 15.1].	The Environmental Services EP covers food safety. A separate Food Safety EP is therefore not required. In progress
Advertise policy via newsletter & website to public/food businesses.	31.03.04		
Revise the Enforcement Procedure to include reference to PACE & RIPA.	31.03.04	3.2.8 (ii) Review and revise the formal enforcement procedures to ensure that they include all relevant references and guidance. [The Standard – 4.1]	In progress
Review and revise the food complaints policy and procedure to include Imported Food and reference to Home/Originating authorities.	31.03.04	3.2.22 Review and revise the food complaints policy and procedure to ensure that complaints about imported foods are covered and that the procedures include all relevant guidance, such as contact with Home and Originating Authorities. [The Standard – 8.1].	In progress
Review and revise the Imported Food procedure in respect of RASFF alerts.	31.03.04	3.2.26 Review and expand the documented procedures to ensure that adequate procedural guidance is provided in relating to receiving and responding to RASFF alerts. [The Standard – 14.4].	In progress
Develop and implement a documented internal monitoring procedure.	31.03.04	3.3.3 Develop and implement documented monitoring procedures that enable the Service to verify its conformance with relevant legislating, official guidance, its own policies and procedures and the Standard in relation to imported food controls. [The Standard – 19.1].	Completed

**Committee:** HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE  
**Date:** 26 FEBRUARY 2004  
**Agenda Item No:** 5  
**Title:** HOUSING GRANT ASSISTANCE TO ALMSHOUSES  
**Author:** Will Cockerell (01799) 510581

### **Summary**

- 1 This report advises the Committee that requests have been received by the Trustees of two separate Almshouses within the District requesting granting assistance in refurbishing and repairing vacant units of accommodation which are unsuitable for re-letting in their present condition.
- 2 The report recommends clarifying that the current Uttlesford Housing Renewal Assistance regime includes grant assistance to the Trustees of Almshouses where current living conditions are unsuitable.

### **Background**

- 3 The Council approved a new regime of housing assistance to the private sector in June 2003. It included a provision to give assistance to landlords on low income to encourage the return of empty homes to useful occupation with a current maximum grant of £3,000.
- 4 The Trustees of Almshouses do not fit into the legal definition of a landlord, and the occupiers are not tenants. However, in practice the type of relationship between trustees and residents is broadly similar.
- 5 The refurbishment of these vacant or hard to let flats and houses will provide additional accommodation for local people, increase the income of the Almshouses and avoid the payment of Council Tax on long term empty property.

RECOMMENDED that the Committee clarifies that the current Uttlesford Housing Renewal Assistance is available to the Trustees of Almshouses where refurbishment or repair is necessary to enable the re-letting of the premises.

Background Papers: Report to Health and Housing Committee 5<sup>th</sup> June 2003

**Committee:** Health and Housing Committee  
**Date:** 26 February 2004  
**Agenda Item No:** 6  
**Title:** YOUTH SHELTER, LITTLE WALDEN  
**Author:** Rod Chamberlain (01799) 510508

### **Summary**

- 1 This report requests the Committee to consider a request from the Saffron Walden Town Council for the erection of a Children's shelter at Little Walden.

### **Background**

- 2 A request has been received from the Saffron Walden Town Council asking for permission to be granted for a Youth Shelter to be erected on the Council housing owned land called "The Green" at Little Walden. The reason for this request would be to provide local young people with a facility where they could gather and meet friends. Appended to this report is a copy of the information that was passed to this Council.

### **The Way Forward**

- 3 The residents nearest to the area in question have been consulted. A plan of the area is appended. Some initial feedback has indicated opposition to the proposal on the grounds that the shelter could create a central point in the area where noise and nuisance could be created.
- 4 Should this request be approved by the Committee there will need to be discussions with the Town Council about siting, maintenance and insurance. Planning permission will also be required. It is felt that this should be at no expense to this Council.
- 5 An update on the consultation will be provided at the meeting.

RECOMMENDED that the Committee consider, as owners of the land, whether or not permission is granted to the Saffron Walden Town Council for a Youth shelter to be erected as outlined in the report.

Background Papers: Correspondence from Saffron Walden Town Council 2003.

**Committee:** Health and Housing Committee  
**Date:** 26 February 2004  
**Agenda Item No:** 7  
**Title:** Rent Collection Service  
**Author:** Rod Chamberlain (01799) 510508

### **Summary**

- 1 This report advises the Committee of the current rent collection arrangements and recommends that this service be discontinued.

### **Background**

- 2 In 1995 the Council withdrew the general rent collection service. However, it was agreed that the service would continue to be provided for those tenants who were unable to pay their rent by any other way. At the time about 300 tenants opted for the rent collection service. Most of these tenants were either elderly or located in very rural parts of the District.

### **The Current Position**

- 3 The Service is operated by a temporary part-time officer, who, as part of her duties, collects the rent on 8 days out of 20 each month. There are currently eight collection rounds. Therefore rent is collected 13 times per year from each tenant. The cost per collection, per tenancy, is approximately £6 (£77 per year).
- 4 Officers have recently reviewed this service in view of the fact that now only 110 tenants use this collection service and the number is very gradually reducing each year. There are a further 11 tenants who have made arrangements with relatives and friends, within the original 110, for the rent to be paid by this method.
- 5 The tenants in question have all been surveyed in an endeavour to ascertain if withdrawal of the service would cause them hardship. 97 out of 110 responded.
- 6 Of this 97, only four indicated that they did not have any other way of paying their rent. Clearly, the situation has changed a great deal since the facility was offered in 1995. It should be noted that the Government is encouraging the payment of state benefits and pensions into bank or post office accounts.
- 7 There is no doubt that some tenants prefer the rent to be collected as it gives them some social contact with the officer in question. However, the Council



has to consider the health and safety issues relating to an officer collecting cash. Research has shown that very few Councils operate such a service and in Essex it is provided by only Tendring and Uttlesford. A risk assessment indicates a risk of attack and robbery.

### **The Way Forward**

- 8 Officers feel that the Council, for the reasons given in this report, should discontinue this service during the next few months. Should the Committee approve this proposal, arrangements would be made for each tenant in question to be visited and their needs discussed and assistance, where necessary given (help with completing forms, explaining other payment options etc). It is felt that the service should finally cease by 1 July 2004.
- 9 For the eight days currently spent on rent collection this time can be fully utilised on new essential work required to the upgrading of the housing computer system. In addition there would be an opportunity of increasing work done on chasing long term rent arrears cases. This position would be subject of a review during 2005.
- 10 The views of the Tenant Forum on this issue will be reported verbally to the Committee.

RECOMMENDED that the Rent Collection Scheme be discontinued by 1 July 2004 and that discussions take place with all involved tenants in order to make alternative rent payment arrangements.

Background Papers: Survey Data 2003.

**Committee:** Health and Housing Committee  
**Date:** 26 February 2004  
**Agenda Item No:** 8  
**Title:** Service Plans 2004 – 2005:  
Housing and Health Services  
**Author:** Rod Chamberlain (01799) 510508  
Ian Orton (01799) 510402  
Dick Secker (01799) 510580

### **Summary**

- 1 This report provides the Committee with an overview of Service Planning for the authority as a whole and a summary of the specific Service Plans for Housing and Health Services for 2004 – 2005.

## **Background**

- 2 The Council is committed to improving services and performance. Service Plans are an integral part of the process. Through the production of Service Plans the Council is able to determine resource allocation and project manage a range of service priorities during a set time. Service Planning ensures that managers have clearly identified that the resources are in place to deliver the aspirations of Members, the community and any new legislation that may come on stream.
- 3 Service Planning cannot be considered in isolation and is now an integrated part of the Service & Financial Planning cycle within the authority that begins with political, managerial and community aspirations and legal requirements.
- 4 These aspirations and requirements form the basis of resource allocation and if funding is agreed the targets that underpin Service Plans are linked to the appraisal framework of staff. All staff are regularly appraised and part of the process involves setting targets linked to the delivery of service and corporate plans. These are particularly important in Uttlesford at present as the Council works towards becoming more of a performance and reward culture. A diagram outlining this process is shown at Appendix A.
- 5 Service Planning for 2004 – 2005 has been developed using a template for all services within the Council. Heads of Service have produced Service Plans for 2004/2005 that include:
  - Brief introduction to the Service
  - The contribution made by the Service to the Mission Statement of the Council
  - The five Strategic Themes from the Corporate Plan – How the Service will deliver sections of the Corporate Plan
  - The aim of the Service
  - Situation Analysis involving the performance, strengths, weaknesses, partnerships and customer perspective of the service.
  - Key Aims and Objectives 2004 to 2007
  - Appendices which cover Staff Resources, Accommodation, Equality and Risk Management and provide a comprehensive Annual Work Programme.
- 6 The information aims to provide the existing strengths and weaknesses of the service, how its plans will be delivered and the contribution the department will make to the strategic and performance framework of the Council.

## **Housing & Health Service Plans**

- 7 The following are seen as new key aims.

## KEY AIMS

## PROGRAMME

Achieve the Government's Decent Home Standard for the Council's stock.	Phased equally over three years 2004-07 (dependent on flow of RTB transitional receipts)
Refurbish outdated sheltered housing scheme at Vicarage Mead, Thaxted	Preparatory work 2004/05. Work on site 2005/06
Carry out a full stock options appraisal, by consultants, of the Council's stock/ability to remain an effective landlord. Employ the services of an Independent Tenant Adviser to assist the tenants	Bulk of appraisal work 2004/05. Final stages of exercise and report to Members 2005/06
Improve rent collection arrangements to ensure all tenants have suitable and safe methods of payment	2004/05
Define key workers and their requirements	Survey 2004/05. Follow up any action 2005/07
Establish housing needs of elderly tenants and the scale of under occupation	Survey work 2004/05. Ascertain housing units of under occupation 2005/06
Open up housing opportunities for housing applicants through a single housing register for Council and Housing Association if practical	Research work 2004/05
Review leasehold management procedures and practices	2004/05
Undertake work on creation of new service charges in accordance with Government guidance, and in consultation with tenants.	End 2004
Ensure all actions detailed in the Housing Strategy and Business Plan are completed in accordance with the objectives in those documents.	As set out in the previously agreed plans.
Implement the Action Plans resulting from the Inter Authority Audits and Food Safety Agency audit for imported food	October 2004

Undertake annual food safety inspection programme 2004/05

Undertake audits of the Border Inspection Post at Stansted Airport as required by DEFRA to ensure compliance with EU requirements in preparation of any EU Veterinary inspection Ongoing quarterly audits

Undertake a Best Value Review of Environmental Health and Licensing Services 2004/05

8 In addition to the above the core functions of the Services will include:-

- Implement cyclical property maintenance programmes, including external repair and re-decoration and regular servicing of appliances, such as central heating and other electrical and mechanical service contracts
- Implement normal projected Planned Programme of Work/Improvements
- Management of asbestos/legionella
- Dealing with approximately 10,000 orders for repairs
- Carry out work to other Council property
- Administer applications (approximately 40-50) from tenants under the Right to Buy, Rent to Mortgage, Cash Incentive or Shared Ownership Schemes
- Provide and recharge for a range of property related services to homeowners
- Provide a leasehold management service to approximately 120 leaseholders
- Devise and monitor housing stock improvement programmes including a decent homes investment programme
- Prepare budgets and monitor income and expenditure
- Enabling new housing within district in conjunction with partners
- Review of various strategies (Housing, Homelessness, Housing Business Plan)
- 10 approximately Tenant Forum Meetings
- 20 approximately Residents Meetings/Road shows
- Production of 3/4 newsletters
- Deal with 120 approximate Homeless Applications
- Provide daily contact with all sheltered tenants
- Provide approximately 100 new subscribers with lifeline
- Administer 3,500 rent accounts for dwellings/garages and reduce rent arrears
- Collect/accountancy/rent arrear services for a total of approximately £9m
- Process approximately 600 new applications for housing
- Provide day to day estate management services for tenants
- Process Welfare requests for assistance

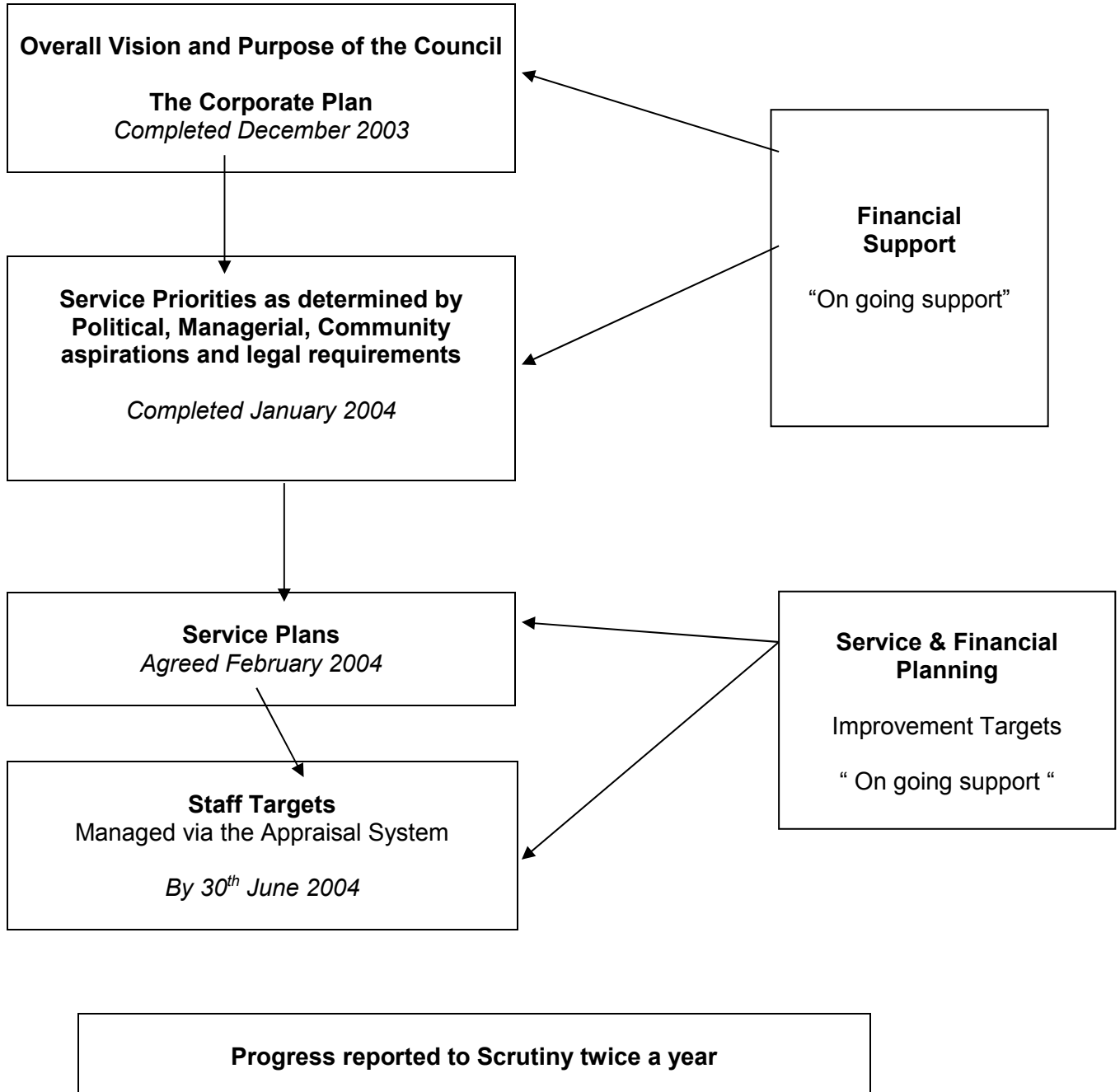
- Provide Housing Advice to customers
- Upgrading of Housing Services computer system
- Review delivery of imported food function at Stansted Airport
- Implement health and safety inspection plan

RECOMMENDED that the Committee notes the Service Planning process and confirms the Service Plans for Housing & Health Services for 2004 – 2005

Background Papers: Service Plans 2003/4/05

## Appendix A

### Service Planning Process 2004- 2005



**Committee:** Health and Housing Committee  
**Date:** 26 February 2004  
**Agenda Item No:** 9  
**Title:** Housing Capital Programme (Supplementary)  
**Author:** Rod Chamberlain (01799) 510508

### **Summary**

- 1 This report advises the Committee of the extra resources that have been identified for Housing projects covering the period 2004-07 and recommends approval of a programme of work.

### **Background**

- 2 Further to previous reports to this Committee and the Resources Committee, the Council has agreed that extra work can be undertaken to the Council's housing stock over the next three years.
- 3 This is mostly because the Council will be able to retain, specifically for housing projects, some of the Right to Buy housing capital receipts over the next three years as part of the transitional arrangements.
- 4 Appended to this report is a summary of the proposed extra programme of works for the next three years in order to utilise this extra funding opportunity.
- 5 There are three main areas of work which can now be carried out by the Council as follows:

### **Vicarage Mead**

- 6 It was reported to the Committee in January, that only one Housing Association submitted proposals to carry out the required work. This proposal has now been evaluated. The proposal outlines refurbishment of the complex providing 19 x 1 and 2 bedroom flats. Work would be subject of a successful application for grant to the Housing Corporation and require the transfer of the complex at no cost to the Housing Association. It should be noted that partnership working with a Housing Association was only considered as it was originally expected that the Council would not have the resources available to do the work 'in house'
- 7 However, extra funding can now facilitate the Council doing the work and the Council's scheme would provide 20 x 1 bedroom flats with the refurbishment incorporating some significant remodelling of communal facilities. An informal residents meeting was held on 2 February 2004 and of the eight

tenants who attended (out of 11) all indicated that they would prefer the Council to do the work. Accordingly, it is felt that the Committee should endorse that the Council carries out this work 'in house'

### **Sewerage Treatment Plants**

- 8 The programme indicates that during the three year period, a number of replacement sewerage treatment plants can be undertaken. In this context the Environmental Services Department will decide the plants that are most in need of urgent attention. As a number of private homes are connected to these plants there will be an issue of recharging part of the cost. Therefore replacement will be subject to detailed consultation with all the relevant parties. Members will be kept informed, via the Member Bulletin, of the treatment plants that will be replaced.

### **Decent Homes Work**

- 9 In accordance with the Council's Quality of Life Corporate Plan, there is an expectation that the Council's housing stock will meet the Decent Homes Standard in advance of the Government's 2010 deadline. The proposed extra work over the next three years will significantly assist with the Decent Homes work which was identified, as at December 2002, as part of the Stock Condition Survey. The work will be targeted to include new windows, doors, chimneys, kitchens and bathrooms. As a result the Government's decent homes standard is likely to be achieved by 2007.
- 10 It is felt essential that the proposed list of work is approved so that planning and implementation can commence as soon as possible. It is expected that to assist with the extra work that some extra staffing will be required on a temporary contract basis. The funding for temporary staff is incorporated within the overall costs.

RECOMMENDED that the Committee approve the programme of work as identified in the report, which includes the Council carrying out the refurbishment work to Vicarage Mead, Thaxted, and for it to be funded from the extra Housing related resources identified and available to the Council 2004-07.

Background Papers: Reports to Resources Committee (Council Feb 04)  
Quality of Life Corporate Plan 2004  
Housing Business Plan