

**HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30pm on 3 MARCH 2005**

Present:- Councillor M A Hibbs – Chairman.
Councillors C A Bayley, K J Clarke, S Flack, E Gower,
E W Hicks, R M Lemon and A Marchant.

Also present:- Councillor P A Wilcock

Tenant Forum representatives:- Mr I Blows and Mrs J Bolvig-Hansen.

Officers in attendance:- D Burridge, R Chamberlain, S Clark, R Goodey,
R Millership, C Roberts and J Snares.

HH57 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

An apology for absence was received from Councillor W F Bowker.
Councillor C A Bayley explained that his progress at Saffron Walden had
been good and the move to Addenbrookes was hopefully only temporary to
deal with a low blood count. Members asked her to convey their best wishes
to Councillor Bowker.

The Chairman welcomed Russell Goodey and Suzanna Clark to the meeting.

Councillor Hibbs declared a prejudicial interest as a practising architect in the
district in relation to items about a proposed vehicular access at Woodside,
Rickling and about land at Waldgroves, Great Dunmow.

HH58 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2005 were received,
confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HH59 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute HH55 – Public Health Budget – Prioritisation

In answer to a question from Councillor Hibbs the Executive Manager
Environment and Cultural Services confirmed that the Resources Committee
had approved the recommendations made for meeting the target saving of
£17,000.

(ii) Minute HH56 – Housing Revenue Account Estimates 2005/6

Written updates about proposed work to sewage plants and the ad
hoc/planned work split were circulated at the meeting, and the Programme
Officer, Mrs R Millership, explained the proposals and their benefits for
tenants and the general public.

In answer to a question from Councillor Flack she confirmed that it would take a number of years for Great Hallingbury to be given a connection to the main sewer system. Meantime the water authority was pressing the Council for replacement of the existing plant, which was in poor condition. The advantage would be adoption of the new plant by the water authority.

The Programme Officer also informed Members of the latest work split achievements and gave them the updated budget figures for Vicarage Mead. The Chairman congratulated officers on the new work split ratios.

HH60

FEES AND CHARGES REVIEW

The Executive Manager (Environment and Cultural Services) invited Members to consider the report containing a proposed review of fees and charges which had remained at the same level for some years. The review had been prepared following benchmarking exercises with a view to submitting appropriate recommendations to the Resources Committee and Council.

The report also recommended additions and changes to pricing policy as regards Pest Control, Border Inspection Post charges and charges for micro-chipping of pets.

Members were mindful of the need to bring the Council's fees and charges and pricing policy and structure into line with those of other Councils, and having regard to the recent benchmarking exercise, to balance the need to recover the cost of service provision with the need in particular to provide affordable services for needy recipients

They discussed the possible impact of the reviewed fees and charges, and it was noted that the Committee's financial targets would be met. The Executive Manager (Environment and Cultural Services) agreed to investigate who was responsible for the licensing of slaughter houses and cinemas.

RECOMMENDED to the Resources Committee that approval be given to the proposed fees and charges for 2005/6 and the pricing policy additions and changes relating to pest control, fee structure for the Border Inspection Post and the micro-chipping of pets.

HH61

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING SURVEY

The Committee considered the report of the Principal Environmental Health Officer on progress with the commissioning of this survey pursuant to the decision of the Council to carry out a full Private Sector Housing Survey.

In answer to a question from Councillor Flack the Executive Manager Housing Services agreed to investigate the appropriateness in the advertisement of the word "fitness" as an alternative to "unfitness", but added that the wording of the advertisement might reflect requirements of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

RESOLVED that the placement of the advertisement to commission this survey be approved

HH62

RENT DEPOSIT SCHEME

A report was submitted advising the Committee of the progress made to date with the decision of the Council to set up and fund a Rent Deposit Scheme within Uttlesford.

The research carried out by officers had indicated that it would not be practical for the Council to run such a scheme on its own. Officers' advice was that in the light of discussions with and recommendations from District Councils elsewhere, it was considered that a scheme in partnership with King Street Housing Society would be feasible. An appendix to the report showed an outline of the basic proposal how such a scheme would work in Uttlesford.

In answer to a question from Councillor Flack, it was added that if the scheme were successful the Council would probably seek to run it "in-house".

Members acknowledged that there would be some financial risks inherent in this type of scheme, and it was noted that the policy would need to be reviewed in 2006.

It was noted that this type of scheme was specifically aimed at preventing homelessness, and that there was a possibility of some further financial support from the ODPM with a Council contribution of £25,000.

(Councillors S Flack and R M Lemon declared non-prejudicial interests in this item in so far as they were private landlords)

RESOLVED that approval be given to the setting up of the Rent Deposit Scheme in partnership with King Street Housing Society as outlined in the report.

HH63

RIGHT TO BUY POLICY CHANGES

The Committee received the report of the Housing Programme Officer describing key right to buy provisions contained in the Housing Act 2004 and suggesting procedures to enable the Council to comply with the Act.

Members discussed the implications of this legislation for the Council at length and decided that the discretion not to demand all or part of the discount received should be a matter for the decision of the Committee in exceptional cases following recommendation by officers.

RESOLVED that

- 1 The new RTB procedures are noted.

- 2 Discretion not to demand all or part of the discount received should be an exception to be authorised by the Committee following the recommendation of the Executive Manager of Housing Services or the Chief Executive in consultation with the Executive Managers of Corporate Governance and Finance and Asset Strategy.
- 3 Officers investigate and agree, subject to satisfactory arrangements, partnership working with social landlords to enable the repurchase of appropriate RTB properties. A monitoring report on the outcome including financial implications would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.
- 4 That a budget be identified to fulfil the Council's obligations regarding the supply of information concerning RTB and home ownership, and that an appropriate target date be set for publication

HH64

HOUSING SERVICES STRUCTURE

The Committee considered a report by the Executive Manager (Housing Services) recommending adoption of a proposed new structure for the Property Services and associated elements of the Housing Services, which had formed the subject of consultation with staff and with Unison.

It was noted that para 9 of the report was now not a part of the recommended re-structuring.

Members and one of the Tenant's Representatives inquired about the use of agency workers. The Executive Manager (Housing Services) explained that the Department was dependant on agency workers and that the proposed new structure would significantly reduce this need.

RESOLVED that in the light of consultation with staff and to enable delivery of first class services in the future, the proposed new structure (excepting para 9 of the report) relating to the Housing Services be approved.

HH65

HOUSING SERVICES – SERVICE PLAN 2005-8

The Committee considered the updated Service Plan for Housing Services for 2005 – 2008. The Plan had been updated for the period 2005-2008 following the recent budget process and also took into account the latest policy decisions made by the Committee.

Members asked questions about sustainability issues and felt it should be stressed that provision of affordable housing required first the construction of a planning policy to deliver that outcome.

Mrs Bolvig-Hansen made a request that the Tenants' Forum Minutes be tabled as an agenda item at the next meeting

The Chairman of the Committee thanked the Housing Programme Officer and the Housing Repairs Officer for the paper they had prepared on sustainability and commented that he was delighted this topic had been taken so far forward.

RESOLVED that the Committee endorses the Housing Services Service Plan 2005– 2008 and that an item for consideration of the Tenants' Forum Minutes be placed on the agenda for the next meeting.

(Having declared his interest in the following two items of business earlier in the meeting, Councillor Hibbs left the meeting and took no part in the voting or discussion thereon.)

The Vice-Chairman of the Committee, Councillor Bayley, took the Chair for the next two items of business.

HH66

WOODSIDE RICKLING – VEHICULAR ACCESS

The Committee considered a report by the Housing Programme Officer advising Members of a request for a review of their decision on this matter.

The Housing Programme Officer described a compromise position arrived at following discussions between all interested parties. The proposal avoided the need for a shared driveway and the District Valuer confirmed that no significant change would be caused to the value of the Council's adjoining plot. The proposal would be subject to the success of a fresh planning application.

RESOLVED that the course of action set out in the report as a compromise position be adopted, and that the request of the tenant of No 6 Woodside be replied to accordingly.

(Councillor S Flack declared an interest in the following item of business in so far as she knew the owners of a relevant property. She left the meeting and took no part in the voting or discussion on the item.)

(Councillor K J Clarke declared a non-prejudicial interest in the following item of business in so far as he was a member of the Dunmow Town Strategy Group, which was working with the Great Dunmow Town Council on options for a Dunmow area action plan.)

HH67

LAND AT WALDGROOMS GREAT DUNMOW

The Committee considered a report by the Housing Programme Officer advising Members of a request for it to sell an area of Council owned land at Waldgrooms in Great Dunmow to provide an access road to potential development land at Buildings Farm House.

The site was within the development limits of Great Dunmow. The Council owned land was the only access to the site and the Committee was therefore being asked to indicate whether, in principle, it was prepared to enter into negotiations regarding this land.

Members considered that there was no pressure to sell and that in this context options for the general planning of development at Dunmow needed to be established and taken into account.

RESOLVED that the Committee is not prepared to enter into negotiations regarding the sale of the area of land in question at this time, is concerned to enable any other options for the general planning of development at Dunmow to be taken into consideration and wishes the Development Control Committee to be alerted to this Committee's decision with respect to this land.

HH68 **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 item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of Exempt Information, as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

HH69 **PLANNED SERVICES MANAGER**

Consideration was given to a request of the Planned Services Manager to retire early on the grounds of the efficiency of the service.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the request of the Planned Services Manager to retire early be forwarded for the consideration of the Resources Committee with the Health and Housing Committee's recommendation that it be supported on the grounds of the efficiency of the service and in view of a significant saving to the Council, and that his service be enhanced by one year and 222 days as outlined in the report.
- 2 the Committee's gratitude for the Planned Services Manager's thirty years of service with this Council be recorded in the Minutes.

The meeting ended at 10.00 pm.