

**HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES  
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 9 JUNE 2005**

Present:- Councillor M A Hibbs – Chairman.  
Councillors W F Bowker, S Flack, E Gower and R M Lemon.

Also present:- Councillors A Dean and J P Murphy.

Tenant Forum Representative:- Mrs J Bolvig-Hansen.

Officers in attendance:- R Chamberlain, S Clarke, W Cockerell, P O'Dell,  
R Hutchinson, E Petrie, P Snow, J Snares and T Turner.

**HH70 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C A Bayley, E W Hicks and A Marchant and from I Blows (Tenant Forum Representative).

Councillor Hibbs declared a prejudicial interest as a practising architect in the District in relation to any references to planning applications.

**HH71 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2005 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**HH72 BUSINESS ARISING**

**(i) Minute HH62 – Rent Deposit Scheme**

The Executive Manager (Housing Services) reported that the Rent Deposit Scheme was now in operation.

**(ii) Minute HH64 – Housing Services Structure**

It was noted that the new Housing Services structure had now been approved by the Resources Committee and was in the process of being implemented.

**(iii) Minute HH69 – Planned Services Manager**

Members noted that the Resources Committee had approved the early retirement of the Planned Services Manager.

**HH73 PUBLIC HEALTH**

The Executive Manager (Strategy and Performance) reported on work in progress within the Council on public health issues and on the need for a joint action plan between the Council and the Uttlesford Primary Care Trust (UPCT) to recruit a high calibre Director of Public Health.

The report outlined an extensive range of initiatives currently being undertaken by the Council as a direct provider either in partnership or as an enabler on the public health agenda. The PCT had approached the Council to extend joint working on the public health agenda through the recruitment of a Director of Public Health. This post would be a PCT board level appointment and would have a key role in working with the local community in leading and driving programmes to improve health and well-being and reduce inequality. It was suggested that the post would bring purpose to the public health work of both bodies and would enable a joint action plan to be developed and pursued through appropriate projects and programmes.

Councillor Flack asked what were the financial implications of the proposal at this stage. The Executive Manager said that this was an unknown factor and was one of the considerations that would have to be discussed with the PCT. If there were any financial implications for this Council, the matter would have to be referred back to this Committee and to the Resources Committee.

The Chairman said that there was no clear indication of the cost implications of dealing with the common responsibilities listed in the report and that clearer definitions would have to be found before a final agreement could be reached. At this stage, the outline principles of agreement were being established.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the continuing work on the public health agenda be noted;
- (b) agreement in principle be given to support UPCT in recruiting a Director of Public Health; and
- (c) relevant arrangements be delegated to the Executive Manager (Environmental and Cultural Services) in consultation with the Chairman of this Committee.

HH74

## **SHARED CARE**

Members received a report detailing action being taken by a number of agencies to assist those in drug and alcohol dependency and seeking the Committee's formal support for specialist services such as the Shared Care scheme. Shared Care supplied a means of equipping and supporting GP's to provide specialist services in primary care settings. It was being promoted in line with the Community Safety Strategy by partnership organisations, such as the Essex Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT). This was being supported locally by the Uttlesford Alcohol and Drugs Strategy Group which served as a mechanism to link with DAAT and had benefited from dedicated officer input.

Councillor Murphy spoke in support of the broad thrust of the report and stressed the crime and disorder implications of drug and alcohol dependency. He said that some GP's in Uttlesford considered that the best way to deal with this problem was through centralised specialist provision in centres such as Harlow or Cambridge. He thought that local drug users would be more likely to deal directly with drug dealers rather than travelling to these centres if local

support such as shared care was not available. He asked Members to give their support to the Shared Care scheme and to consider a strategy of making direct appeals to local GP practices to provide this service locally.

Other Members supported the principle of shared care and agreed that those in drug and alcohol dependency were vulnerable and in need of additional support, particularly in rural areas. However, it was agreed that discussions should take place with the Uttlesford Primary Care Trust before an approach was made to local GP's.

RESOLVED that the Committee note the issues raised in the report and add its support to the campaign for greater support of services to drug users in line with the Community Safety Strategy in cooperation with partners such as UPCT and the drug and alcohol action team; this may include direct appeals to GP practices in the District on behalf of the wider community stressing the crime and disorder implications of such services.

#### HH75 **TENANT FORUM MEETING – 4 APRIL 2005**

The Committee received for information, the Minutes of the Tenant Forum meeting held on 4 April 2005. It was noted that a more recent meeting had taken place and this would be reported at the Committee's next meeting.

#### HH76 **HOUSING STOCK OPTIONS APPRAISAL**

The Executive Manager (Housing Services) reported on the outcome of the Stock Options Appraisal process (SOA) which had resulted in a recommendation by the SOA Steering Group that there were presently no grounds for a stock transfer to take place, though the matter should continue to be reviewed on a regular basis.

He reminded Members that it was a requirement of the Government that all stock owning councils carried out a stock options appraisal and a time table had been fixed which required this exercise to be completed and signed off by GO-East by July 2005. The SOA had been a significant piece of work that had resulted in defining aspirational "bronze", "silver" and "gold" standards as part of the consultation exercise and provided different means of achieving the Government's Decent Homes standard by the target date of 2010.

The report outlined the consultation arrangements that had been made and other events that had been part of the appraisal process including workshops and study visits. An executive summary of the report by the financial consultant and a report produced by the Independent Tenant Advisor were included as appendices to the report.

The components of the aspirational standards of bronze, silver and gold were outlined to Members. It was noted that bronze standard was equivalent to the current standard of dwellings and services which succeeded in delivering and maintaining the minimum decent homes standard. It was considered also that the silver standard was attainable and could be developed as part of a

package of investments amounting to an additional £2.4 million net present value expenditure that could be afforded within the business plan. The four main options to be considered as part of the appraisal process were defined as follows:-

- Stock retention and direct management
- Arms Length Management Organisation
- Private Finance Initiative
- Transfer to a registered social landlord

Members noted that the financial consultant had concluded that the Council could meet and maintain the decent homes standard and could achieve a higher “silver” standard with a reasonable financial position, but that if the “gold” standard were to be considered, then the only option would be to prepare a stock transfer proposal. This latter option could only be pursued following a positive result from a ballot of tenants. Neither an arms length nor a PFI arrangement were considered to be viable options.

Mrs Bolvig-Hansen expressed disappointment with the poor attendance at the recent Members’ workshop. She said that tenants expected a greater level of commitment from their District Councillors. The Chairman endorsed this view.

Councillor Flack said that the Council was a prudent and caring landlord and she would be horrified if tenants were to vote for a change of ownership. She posed the question whether a retention of the present position was the answer that GO-East wanted.

The Executive Manager responded that the Government wished to encourage a transfer of stock ownership where this was considered to be appropriate, but there was no difficulty with maintaining the present position in existing circumstances. What the Government’s view would be in the future was an unknown factor. He said that it was necessary for extensive paperwork to be sent to the GO-East office for examination in the near future. The appraisal that had been undertaken had been a huge body of work equivalent to conducting a best value review.

Members expressed satisfaction with the outcome of the SOA appraisal and said that it appeared to fit the longer-term requirements of Council tenants. However, there was a need to question how improved levels of participation could be achieved and whether the higher aspirational standards could be achieved because of a potential lack of funding.

The Chairman agreed that the result obtained had been expected, but was nevertheless of great value. A positive dialogue had been established with tenants and there was now a clear idea of what tenants main priorities were. He felt that the definition of standards in the gold, silver and bronze categories was somewhat arbitrary and it might be possible to achieve a better mix. He proposed the recommendation in the report with the addition that the Housing Strategy Working Group be reconvened to consider matters arising as part of

the review. The Executive Manager said that it was especially important to improve the involvement of tenants in sheltered schemes.

RECOMMENDED to Council that, following the Housing Stock Options Appraisal, the housing stock be retained and the position continued to be reviewed annually; and

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) improved tenant participation arrangements be put in place for both general and sheltered housing tenants to discuss and consider in more detail issues highlighted by the stock options appraisal process; and
- (b) the Housing Strategy Working Group be reconvened to consider matters arising as part of the review.

HH77

### **HARD TO LET SHELTERED ACCOMMODATION**

A report was submitted advising Members of the scale of the problem relating to hard to let sheltered units with a particular concentration on Holloway Crescent at Leaden Roding, Mead Court at Stansted and Reynolds Court at Newport. It was noted that of a total sheltered housing stock of 420 units, there were 76 bed sit units and most of the letting difficulties seemed to be concentrated in this area. Accordingly, officers now felt that the time was opportune to explore, in relation to the provision of accommodation for elderly people, alternative uses for some of the sites concerned, in consultation with relevant care agencies, and that a feasibility study should be carried out at a particular site. It was considered that Holloway Crescent at Leaden Roding was the most appropriate site for this to be done. The Committee agreed that this was a suitable approach and that Holloway Crescent would be an appropriate subject for such a study as there was a mix of uses on the site. The Chairman felt that the possible sale of the site to recover the value of the housing land should be ruled out for the reassurance of tenants.

The Executive Manager (Housing Services) advised Members that a meeting of residents at Holloway Crescent would be arranged in the near future to explain the purpose of the feasibility study and dispel any misconceptions about the intention of the study.

RESOLVED that the Committee authorises officers to carry out a feasibility study for hard to let sheltered housing schemes and report back on the best benefits to be obtained for both existing and future tenants.

HH78

### **HOMELESSNESS STATISTICS 2004/05**

The Committee received a report on the numbers of people presenting themselves to be homeless from 1 April 2004 to 31 March 2005 and the causes of their homelessness and their status. It was noted that there had been a significant drop in the number of homeless acceptances compared to

the last two years. This fall in numbers was not indicative of a decline in the overall levels of homelessness within the District, but had resulted from the more proactive approach taken following the implementation of the homelessness strategy and the creation of a dedicated officer post.

The Chairman asked whether the unexpected arrival of potential homelessness cases at Stansted Airport had added to the problem of homelessness within Uttlesford. The Housing Support Officer responded that only three cases of homelessness had arisen as a result of arrivals at the airport in the last year and this was not perceived to be a major problem.

Members were again concerned about the provision of accommodation aimed at younger single people. There was also a short discussion about the use of bed and breakfast accommodation and the Executive Manager (Housing Services) pointed out that Government policy stated that this must be limited to less than six weeks. It was likely that a points based scheme would be maintained, but there was a mismatch with the number of homelessness cases. It was noted in this context that a report would be made to a future meeting of the Committee addressing future allocation policy.

RESOLVED to note the homelessness figures for 2004/05.

HH79

#### **ADAPTATION WORK TO A COUNCIL HOUSE**

The Committee was asked to approve a request to carry out major adaptation work at a council house in Radwinter necessitated by the severe disabilities of two of the occupants.

RESOLVED that the request to carry out adaptation work to a council house in Radwinter be approved.

HH80

#### **SALE OF COUNCIL PROPERTY AT HIGH RODING**

A report was submitted about the condition of a council owned property known as The Wards in High Roding, which was a Grade II, listed timber framed three bedroomed detached cottage. A survey of the property had established that the Council would need to incur excessive expenditure to retain the cottage in a lettable condition due to its age and construction. There would also be continuing annual maintenance costs.

In the circumstances, Members were advised that it would be appropriate for the cottage to be disposed of on the open market in its present condition. It was recommended that the property should be sold through sealed bid tenders.

RESOLVED that the house known as The Wards, High Roding be sold, subject to appropriate terms and conditions in accordance with Standing Orders.

HH81

## **WORK PLAN FOR COMMITTEE**

Members received a report identifying matters that were expected to be considered at each of the next four scheduled Committee meetings.

It was suggested that it might be appropriate for the newly appointed Health Promotion Officer to report to the Committee on progress being made at the meeting scheduled for 27 October 2005.

RESOLVED that the provisional work programme for this Committee in 2005/06 be approved.

HH82

## **COUNCILLOR BOWKER**

The Chairman noted with pleasure the return to active participation in the Committee's affairs of Councillor Bowker and these sentiments were endorsed by the Committee. He also asked for the distribution arrangements for Council papers to Councillor Bowker to be checked.

The meeting ended at 9.10 pm.