

**HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 8 SEPTEMBER 2005**

Present:- Councillor M A Hibbs – Chairman.
Councillors C A Bayley, S Flack, E W Hicks, V J T Lelliott, R M
Lemon, A Marchant and A M Wattebot

Tenant Forum Representative:- Mrs J Bolvig-Hansen

Also present for part of the meeting:- D Barron (Chairman) and M Walker
(Chief Executive), Uttlesford PCT and V Etheridge (Go-East)

Officers in attendance:- A Bovaird, D Burrige, R Chamberlain, W
Cockerell, R Goodey, N Harris, R Millership, G Smith, P Snow,
A Stewart and T Turner

HH83

PRESENTATION ON HEALTHY FUTURES

Members received a presentation from Vicky Etheridge of Go East on Healthy Futures, a regional health strategy consultation for the East of England. She was speaking in her capacity as Senior Public Health Manager for the East of England Public Health Group which was the policy arm of the Department of Health and was based at the Cambridge Go East Office. She said that the Group had been asked by the Regional Assembly to help develop a new Regional Health Strategy and her presentation outlined the main elements of the draft consultation strategy and its particular relevance to Uttlesford.

Councillor Flack declared a non-prejudicial interest in this and the following item as Chairman of the Scrutiny 2 Committee. She reminded Members that she was presently Chairman of the Regional Housing Panel at the East of England Regional Assembly. She said that the East of England was an artificial geographical area and contained many elements that had little in common with each other. In building strategic policies it was important not to aim to reduce inequalities at the expense of raising standards of service.

The Chairman agreed with this sentiment and said that there was a need for all levels of service to be improved. He was concerned that there would be a particular concentration on areas of greatest inequality and policies developed as a result would not be appropriate for all areas.

In conclusion, Vicky Etheridge agreed that any further questions should be addressed to her at the Go East Office by email or by letter.

HH84

PRESENTATION ON PRIMARY CARE TRUST REORGANISATION

Melanie Walker, Chief Executive of the Uttlesford PCT gave a presentation on an informal consultation being undertaken by the Strategic Health Authority (SHA) to review the pattern of Primary Care Trusts, the Ambulance service and the SHA itself. She said that a more formal process of consultation would follow on at a later stage.

The Department of Health had issued a document in July 2005 suggesting changes to the way in which services were commissioned to reflect patient choice, setting out an accelerated time frame for practice based commissioning, and suggesting options for the streamlining of PCT's and SHA's. Additional funds generated by expected savings would be released and it was anticipated that approximately £7.5 million would be made available in Essex and an additional £200,000 in Uttlesford.

Various options had been set out for the streamlining of PCT's all of which would involve moving away from the present system of district based PCT boundary arrangements. It was also being suggested that the Ambulance Trust should be reorganised on a regional basis and the Essex Ambulance Board had expressed a view in favour of this proposal as it would concentrate more resources within the Ambulance service.

The consultation proposals anticipated that a new commissioning PCT would set targets to decide what would be the best services for each of the areas within the East of England region. The timescales indicated were that PCT mergers would be completed by October 2006 with SHA mergers following on by April 2007. The Ambulance service would be reorganised with effect from April next year. Melanie Walker indicated that it had been suggested that these changes would happen more quickly in Essex but this was now unlikely. As part of the informal consultation arrangements, it was requested that responses should be sent to the PCT and to the Secretary of State by the beginning of October. The review of provider functions would be subject to a separate consultation exercise from the Office of the Secretary of State.

Members asked a number of questions about how the new arrangements were expected to work. Melanie Walker said that the strongest view was for two PCT's in Essex based on a North/South division and that it would be for the Department of Health to monitor whether the Uttlesford PCT had succeeded in making £200,000 worth of savings. She said that the new management structure was presently unclear and would need further clarification.

Members expressed a number of concerns about the way in which the new structure would operate and the Chairman of the Uttlesford PCT suggested that representations should be sent to the Department of Health to echo locally expressed concerns wherever possible. The Chairman thanked Melanie Walker for her presentation and said that the Council's comments would be determined when the matter was further discussed later in the meeting.

HH85

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors W F Bowker and E Gower.

Councillors Flack and Lelliott both declared a personal interest in item 9 relating to an update of garage sites.

HH86 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2005 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HH87 **BUSINESS ARISING**

(i) **Minute HH76 – Housing Stock Options Appraisal**

The Executive Manager (Housing Services) confirmed that the Council had endorsed the outcome of the Housing Stock Options Appraisal and the process had now been duly signed off by Go East. A meeting of the Housing Strategy Working Group would be arranged in the near future. It was likely that the timing of that meeting would necessitate a verbal report to the next meeting of this Committee on 27 October.

(ii) **Minute HH77 – Hard to Let Sheltered Accommodation**

Members were advised that a residents meeting had now taken place at Holloway Crescent, Leaden Roding and that a follow-up meeting would be arranged with the various care agencies to discuss the way forward. Open days had been arranged at Mead Court, Stansted and Reynolds Court, Newport.

The Executive Manager (Housing Services) reported the receipt of a tender in the sum of £1.92 million for proposed redevelopment work at Vicarage Mead, Thaxted. This was a little in excess of budget provision and discussions had taken place which were likely to lead to a reduction in the overall contract cost to £1.85 million. In response to a question, he confirmed that proposed work at the Vicarage Mead Day Centre was not incorporated within the figure mentioned. It was anticipated that work would commence within the next few weeks and that the overall contract length would be in the region of 15 to 18 months.

HH88 **PRIMARY CARE TRUST REORGANISATION**

Following the presentation by Melanie Walker, Members discussed options presented by the Strategic Health Authority on behalf of the Department of Health to review the pattern of Primary Care Trusts, The Ambulance Trust and the SHA.

It was noted that three options had been suggested for the reorganisation of PCT's in Essex aimed at producing the required financial savings. Members noted that the concept of cross county boundary arrangements was not considered to be appropriate. The three options were:

- Option 1 – One PCT covering the whole of Essex County Council, Southend and Thurrock.
- Option 2 – Two PCT's, one covering North Essex and one covering South Essex.

- Option 3 – Five PCT's each covering the catchment area of one of Essex's District General Hospitals – Uttlesford would be merged with Epping Forest and Harlow.

The Chief Executive explained that the original deadline for this consultation of 5 September had been extended. An approach had been received from Essex County Council and he had given an indication of the likely response of the District Council in view of the relevant time constraints. He said that the Council would be concerned about the loss of localism implied in the three options presented, even in option 3 which was the one that would provide the most local solution. He felt that Members were weary of repeated reorganisations in the Health Service and expressed doubts that the intended financial savings would be achieved. He was unsure about the argument in favour of economies of scale and how the implementation of nationally determined price scales would actually work. Some local structure was needed as without this there was the danger of local responsibility without accountability and that overall costs would stay the same.

He felt that the Chief Executive of the Uttlesford PCT had been put in an impossible position in attempting to explain the reorganisation proposals and, referring to the three star status that had been achieved, that the Council should say to the Department of Health that the Council wish to retain that level of excellence at a local level.

Of the bullet points mentioned on page 2 of the report, he felt only the final one referring to a 15% reduction in management and administrative costs would cause no significant difficulties. The Department of Health should be persuaded to look at the possibility of adopting cross boundary arrangements if these could be seen to better reflect the reality of local health care provision. A great deal of collaborative work that had been undertaken between the Council and the PCT would be jeopardised if these proposals were implemented and he felt the Council should urge the Department of Health and the SHA to allow these arrangements to continue to be developed.

Melanie Walker explained how the proposed commissioning arrangements would work but felt that there was presently a lack of clarity about the precise working arrangements. A great deal of money had been invested in local health care services, for example the digital x-ray equipment recently installed at Saffron Walden Community Hospital. The principal challenge now was what should be done with the vacant beds at the Community Hospital.

The Chairman expressed a number of concerns about how the proposed commissioning arrangements would operate, particularly in relation to the implementation of a national tariff. There was a danger that the personal touch within the community would be lost. Members agreed that the Chief Executive should be authorised to develop a fourth option for reorganising the Uttlesford PCT and the Essex Strategic Health Authority. This should recognise the feeling of the meeting that locally based health services should be retained with the ability for the services being provided to be influenced at a local level.

RESOLVED that the following representations be made in response to the informal consultation on “Commissioning a Patient-led NHS”:

1. The Council rejects the three options for PCT mergers presented for consultation by the Essex Strategic Health Authority as insufficiently local and as unlikely to deliver anticipated savings;
2. A fourth option be put forward for consideration, consisting of a horizontal merger between the PCT and the Council; alternatively, the Council could see no good reason why cross county boundary arrangements could not be considered, if that were to better reflect the reality of local healthcare provision;
3. The proposed reforms seemed to represent the very real danger of local responsibility without either accountability or concomitant economies of scale being achieved;
4. Further clarification was needed on how the proposed new commissioning arrangements would work in a local context.

Councillor Flack wished it to be recorded that she had abstained as it was likely that Essex County Council would consider making a different proposal at a meeting due on the following day.

HH89

FOOD SAFETY PLAN 2005/06

The Principal Environmental Health Officer reported on a proposed food safety plan for 2005/06 included in full as an appendix to the report. It was a requirement of the Food Standards Agency that every local authority should prepare a food safety service plan and report it to Members for approval.

Councillor Flack asked whether the responsibilities of Environmental Health Officers had changed in relation to the Licensing Act 2003 and whether it would be feasible for visits to be organised which combined these two functions. The Principal Environmental Health Officer responded that food safety inspections dealt with separate topics and it would be difficult and confusing to combine food safety aspects with the Licensing Act requirements.

Reference was also made to the Heartbeat Awards Scheme. This was a three-pronged award to promote healthy eating and it was for each local authority to decide how to utilise the award in accordance with local circumstances. He agreed that it was certainly something the Council should seek to develop further as circumstances permitted.

RESOLVED that the Food Safety Plan 2005/06 be adopted.

HH90

LOCAL AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT

It was reported that the Council's 2005 Air Quality Progress Report had identified an upward trend in nitrogen dioxide levels in parts of Saffron Walden and the Government had advised that results for the next six months should be assessed to establish whether they represented a risk of exceeding national standards at the monitoring sites. The report recommended that the results for the next six months should be subject to close scrutiny and if the trends continued a detailed assessment should be carried out.

Members asked a number of questions about the technical detail of the report and the considerations involved in deciding where to site the monitoring equipment.

RESOLVED that:

1. Results for the next six months be closely monitored and that a more detailed assessment be arranged if improvements did not occur and;
2. A further report be submitted to Members in due course on how future monitoring could be carried out in these circumstances and on what cost implications might be involved.

HH91

MEETING HOUSING NEEDS

The Committee received a report about housing need within the district and suggesting a way forward to address future homelessness and other housing provision. The Executive Manager (Housing Services) said that homelessness was a major problem in Uttlesford, particularly for single people in housing need. He advised that it was unrealistic to expect the Council to be able to meet the challenge of being in the top quartile for the performance indicator BV183A measuring the length of stay for families with children in bed and breakfast accommodation. A recent Government regulation had outlawed the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families with children for periods of more than six weeks other than in an emergency. The Council was also expected by the Government to reduce gradually the numbers of people in other forms of temporary accommodation.

A short term solution to the problem was suggested in the report. This was that empty units would be managed so that several units would be available at any one time for housing homeless families. This would inevitably impact to a small degree on the Council's empty property (void) figures and would need to be carefully monitored to ensure that the objective was being achieved. It was also proposed to establish a task group to look at long-term solutions for the provision of emergency homeless accommodation.

The report examined the feasibility of the Council directly building new housing for rent. Advice from the Housing Corporation indicated that it was extremely unlikely the Council could successfully bid for grant monies. It would be possible to utilise capital resources but this would have implications for the Council's ability to progress other capital projects. In this context,

Members noted that a significant number of dwellings were expected to become available for letting in conjunction with RSL's during the three years from 2005 to 2008. A number of shared ownership units would also be developed within this period.

The Committee also noted the following report on the possible development of some garage unit sites which might provide opportunities for the provision of new social housing.

Members considered the risks of keeping a number of housing units empty for homelessness purposes if they were generally known to be available for letting. It was agreed that this was essentially a stopgap solution and that other strategies would have to be developed over the longer term. It was noted that the Government had established a bed and breakfast unit which was closely monitoring the use of this type of accommodation and might lead to an eventual moratorium.

RESOLVED that:

1. Some lettings be delayed to assist homeless applicants and that these dwellings be excluded from the local PI on void monitoring;
2. A Working Group be formed to assess long term solutions for the provision of emergency homeless accommodation, consisting of Councillors Bayley, Hibbs and Lemon, together with one Member to be nominated by the Conservative Group, and the Chairman of the Tenant Forum; and
3. Officers be instructed to concentrate on working with RSL's and other agencies to provide housing for rent.

HH92

GARAGE SITES UPDATE

Members received a detailed report updating the Committee on the review of Council owned ad hoc garage sites following the report to the January 2005 meeting that had endorsed a programme of reviewing garage sites with a view to possible redevelopment. It was now proposed to take this policy to the next step and that new leases should not be offered on those sites where development potential had been identified. As part of this suggested policy it was proposed to investigate alternative parking arrangements for Council house tenants affected by this decision.

The Chairman was anxious to ensure that comments on individual sites in the report were purely indicative and were not seen to constitute recommendations for the use or disposal of those sites. Members agreed that alternative usage should be investigated for these sites in addition to their development potential. There was also general agreement that officers should discuss development possibilities with planning officers.

In view of these comments, the Committee took the view that recommendations in the report could be adopted subject to a number of amendments and additions.

RESOLVED that:

1. The following policy be adopted in relation to future use of land owned by the Council on those 28 sites where garages had been erected by tenants or by former tenants:
 - a) For sites where a development potential would be identified:
 - No further leases would be offered and that tenants would be advised accordingly;
 - Officers investigate alternative parking arrangements for any Council house tenants affected by any such decision, e.g. off-street parking within the boundary of the tenants' property; and
 - Discussions be held, at that stage, with housing associations/developers leading to the donation or selling of sites suitable for development;
 - b) For sites that would be identified as having no development potential for the Council:
 - A rolling programme be approved based on a division of available annual budget between lighting and resurfacing requirements;
 - New formal tenancy agreements be offered to include good repair and maintenance conditions and
 - An increase be made in leasing charges to reflect costs of the improvement programme;
2. Detailed proposals for any potential development be referred to the Housing Strategy Working Group for initial consideration;
3. Parish Councils and Ward Members be consulted on all recommendations.

HH93

PARTNERING WITH CONTRACTORS

The Housing Repairs Manager reported on possible new methods of partnering in the construction industry and sought approval for the suggested procurement method to be implemented, initially on a pilot project basis, for future housing projects where this was considered to be of benefit to the Council. The report proposed that contracts should be procured by pursuing a partnering approach without the necessity to use price as the most important

criterion for the selection of a contractor. Partnering was primarily aimed at promoting teamwork and was intended to lead to a long-term relationship between the two parties. This approach was in general accordance with the findings in the Latham Report in 1994 and the Egan Report in 1998.

RESOLVED that:

1. The origins and drivers of the partnering approach in the construction industry be noted;
2. Approval be given to a partnering approach being tested on a pilot basis to evaluate the benefits of this method of procurement and the outcome be reviewed and reported to the Committee at a later date.

HH94 **HOUSING SITES IN THE COMMUNITY**

The Chairman advised the Committee that this item had been withdrawn from consideration pending further discussion.

HH95 **TENANT FORUM MINUTES**

The Committee received for information the minutes of the Tenant Forum meeting held on 6 June 2005 and the draft minutes of the meeting held on 1 August.

Councillor Lelliott pointed out that a recurring theme in the Tenant Forum minutes was the apparent lack of knowledge by tenants of the correct procedure for contacting officers. The Chairman said it appeared that some departments within the Council were unaware of the existence of the Tenant Forum. It was agreed that this comment should be noted and that a list of officer contacts would be circulated to all tenants at a suitable opportunity.

HH96 **TENANT COMPACT**

The Committee received a report seeking approval of a revised tenant compact. Once the draft documents had been approved, together with any necessary amendments, the Tenant Forum election could take place.

The Executive Manager (Housing Services) suggested a number of minor amendments to the draft document and Members agreed that these should be adopted. He agreed that he would clarify in the final version of the document those provisions relating to co-option. It was also clarified that tenants were entitled to attend Tenant Forum meetings and Members agreed that the schedule of meetings should be generally advertised so that tenants would have the opportunity to attend if they wished to do so.

Councillor Lelliott asked about the position of tenants of Council garages who were not otherwise Council tenants. The Executive Manager (Housing Services) responded that only tenants of Council dwellings were eligible to be

represented on the Tenant Forum. In this context, the Chairman said that the Committee should, at some future stage, address the question of whether it was appropriate for low cost garaging to be made available to the private sector.

RESOLVED that the revised tenant compact be approved, subject to minor drafting amendments as agreed at the meeting.

HH97

CHOICE BASED LETTINGS

A report was submitted advising Members of an opportunity to bid for ODPM funding with a view to implementing choice based lettings in the district, in conjunction with sub-regional partners. Government funding of £4 million was being made available over a three year period to support the development of regional and sub-regional choice based letting schemes. The bidding round was due to close on 7 October 2005 and it was suggested that the Council should take advantage of the opportunity to submit a bid.

Choice based letting was described as a new approach to letting homes which aimed to make letting arrangements more transparent and to make it easier for tenants and residents to apply for housing with the Council or with RSL's. The option was available for the Council to be involved in a bid to the ODPM with other sub-regional authorities which would offer the potential for large savings on set up and on-going costs. The Committee favoured this approach.

RESOLVED that Officers progress a sub-regional bid to the ODPM for investigation into a choice based lettings scheme.

HH98

PERFORMANCE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT REPORT – FIRST QUARTER 2005

Members received a revised report updating the report submitted with the original papers. It was noted that six of the 15 performance indicators appeared to be below target but that the quarterly results had not yet been profiled against annual targets. The cumulative data for the rest of the year was likely to indicate an improved performance over the figures for the quarter reported.

The Chairman noted that no explanation had been included in the appendix to the report on the below target performance in respect of BV73, the average time taken to complete non-urgent repairs.

RESOLVED that the service performance for Health and Housing for the first quarter of 2005 be noted and that details be circulated to all Committee Members of the reasons for the failure to meet the quoted target.

HH99

BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT 2005/06

Members received a report providing details of the Committee's spending and income compared to the approved budget for the period 1 April to the end of July 2005. The report indicated an underspend of approximately £34,500 as compared to the profiled budget. It was noted that a figure of £21,000 included for airport air and noise monitoring equipment would not now be required as provision had been made for this sum within the capital programme. The Principal Accountant advised that the revised budget would be adjusted downwards accordingly for the January Committee cycle.

RESOLVED that the budgetary control position as at 31 July 2005 be noted.

HH100

SERVICE PLAN PRE-ASSESSMENTS 2006/07

A report was submitted on service plan pre-assessments for each of the Committee's services seeking guidance on which spending pressures Members wished to support pending further guidance on the Council's budget. It was noted that service plan pre-assessments had been circulated in advance to all Members as part of a separate document.

Councillor Bayley asked about the position of administrative assistant in the Environmental Health Office that had been recommended as part of the Best Value Review. The Executive Manager (Environmental and Cultural Services) said the intention had been to increase licence charges and then identify whether enough additional income had been generated to support a new post. The Chairman agreed that there was no need to flag this up as a growth item at this stage.

The Executive Manager commented on the implications for a number of service heads arising from current indications of spending pressures. She agreed that there were a number of potential budgetary implications arising from the impact of an additional workload on the Environmental Protection Team arising largely from the provisions of the Licensing Act 2003.

The Chairman said that he thought the provision of an out of hours noise protection service would become inevitable in the near future and this matter should be flagged up for future discussion as part of the budget process.

There was a brief discussion about the priority accorded to the work of the Animal Warden in view of the additional responsibilities that would be taken on in relation to the control of stray dogs. It was noted that some transfer of funds would take place from the Police Authority to compensate for this transfer and that it might become necessary to raise the priority rating for this service.

It was noted that responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Day Centres was currently a matter for the Community and Leisure Committee.

RESOLVED that the Service Plan pre-assessments, as included in the report to this meeting, be approved for consideration by the Resources Committee for inclusion in the Draft Budget for 2006/07, subject to the additional comments made, especially in relation to noise protection.

The meeting ended at 10.55pm.