

**HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 27 OCTOBER 2005**

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

Also present at the Chairman's invitation:- Councillor D W Gregory.

Tenant Forum Representative:- Mrs J Bolvig-Hansen.

Officers in attendance:- R Chamberlain, S Clarke, W Cockerell, E Petrie,
M T Purkiss and J Snares.

HH101 PRESENTATION ON HEALTH PROMOTION

Prior to the meeting, Caroline Skinner of Uttlesford PCT gave a presentation on health promotion in Uttlesford. She concluded that the overarching priorities were:-

- Reducing smoking, obesity and improving diet and nutrition
- Increasing exercise
- Encouraging sensible drinking
- Improving sexual health and mental health

She also referred to the importance of partnership working and reducing inequalities.

HH102 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

Councillors Bayley and Lelliott both declared a personal interest relating to an update on garage sites and Councillor Lemon declared an interest as a member of Hatfield Heath Parish Council.

HH103 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2005 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HH104 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute HH87 (ii) – Hard to Let Sheltered Accommodation

The Executive Manager (Housing Services) said that a meeting had been held with the relevant agencies and officers had attended a meeting of Leaden Roding

Parish Council. He added that a meeting would now be arranged with specialist housing associations and he would report back to a future meeting. He confirmed that work had started at Vicarage Mead.

(ii) **Minute HH88 - Primary Care Trust Reorganisation**

The Executive Manager (Housing Services) said that a document had now been sent to Members by the Chief Executive giving the complete up to date position regarding the proposed reorganisation of Primary Care Trusts. Councillor Flack said that the County Council had supported a two PCT option made up of a Thames gateway and a northern PCT which would include Brentwood.

(iii) **Minute HH90 - Local Air Quality Management**

The Principal Environmental Health Officer reported that there was now a downward trend in nitrogen dioxide levels in parts of Saffron Walden and he would submit a full report to the next meeting.

(iv) **Minute HH91 - Meeting Housing Needs**

The Executive Manager (Housing Services) reported that the policy of delaying some lettings to assist homeless applicants had been implemented and, although it was early days, appeared to be working well. He also reported that the Homelessness Task Group had met and it had been a good opportunity to discuss the background to the homelessness situation and it had identified work which needed to be undertaken. It was confirmed that Councillor Flack was the Conservative Group representative on this task group.

(v) **Minute HH91 - Garage Sites Update**

The Executive Manager (Housing Services) reported that a letter had been sent to all parish councils affected inviting comments and the Housing Strategy Working Group had agreed that it would be helpful to write again to parish councils. A report would be submitted to the working group on a rolling programme.

Councillor Flack said that in addition to the 28 sites identified at the last meeting, she understood that approaches had been made to other sites and, in particular, mentioned a letter which had been sent to Debden Parish Council. She said that at the last Council Meeting held on 18 October 2005, Councillor Godwin had asked for a full list of sites being looked at and had been promised a written reply within 10 working days as set out in the new constitution. However, she understood that no reply had yet been received. Councillor Hibbs said that he would ensure that a reply was sent as soon as possible. He also confirmed that there were no additions to the 28 sites already identified. However, a previous decision had been made to terminate all garage leases so that the review could take place and also to put future leases on a correct legal basis.

Councillor Lelliott said that the current income from Council garage rents was £140,000, less management costs, and he suggested that an assessment was needed as to whether these rents were low, medium or high before any decision was taken on increasing them. Councillor Hibbs referred to the management costs and the ongoing asbestos replacement programme. The Executive

Manager (Housing Services) said that a survey would be undertaken and available to Members before a decision was made on rent setting.

(vi) **Minute HH96 - Tenant Compact**

Mrs Bolvig-Hansen reported that the nomination period for elections to the tenant compact was underway.

(vii) **Minute HH98 - Performance Information Management Report**

Councillor Flack referred to a case where a property had been occupied after a void period and it was then found necessary to undertake maintenance works. She suggested that better use should be made of the void period to ensure that any maintenance works were carried out prior to new tenants moving in and suggested that random surveys should be undertaken to assess the satisfaction levels of new tenants. The Executive Manager (Housing Services) said that random checks and surveys would be undertaken and Members would be advised of the outcome.

HH105 **NOTICE OF MOTION**

The Committee considered the following Notice of Motion which had been proposed by Councillor Gregory and duly seconded at the last Council meeting and referred to this Committee for consideration:-

“This Council recognises the value of knowing the practical first aid needed to help maintain life.

It therefore seeks to provide and promote together with Uttlesford Primary Care Trust a programme of training in basic first aid or refresher courses to Councillors and staff, and encourages the programme to be extended to the whole community.

Further it seeks the placement of a defibrillator in this building and the training of staff in its use”.

Councillor Gregory explained that the Motion had been prompted by the death of former Councillor Keith Clarke and the London bombings in July. He suggested that there should be a programme of training to enable Council officers and Members to deal with emergency situations. He said that at the Council meeting, Councillor Menell had pointed out that the Primary Care Trust was not able to deal with this, but suggested that the voluntary sector would be able to help. Councillor Gregory asked Members to support the Motion in principle so that first aid training could be undertaken as soon as possible and that provision could be made in the budget for next year.

Mrs Bolvig-Hansen referred to courses provided by the St John Ambulance Service and the Red Cross. Councillor Bayley added that Saffron Walden Town Council had joined the CVSU first aid programme and this had been very useful.

Councillor Flack also mentioned the First Responders scheme which she understood worked very well and suggested that the Council should be involved in this. Councillor Lelliott supported the suggestion of contacting the First Responders and referred to the difficulties involved with the use of defibrillators. Councillor Hibbs felt that first aid training should be provided for all staff and Members who wished to take part, but considered that the costs needed to be identified before making any requests to the Resources Committee. It was then

RESOLVED that officers prepare a report for the next meeting of the Committee on the implications of providing first aid training including reference to the First Responders scheme and that existing first aiders be asked for their views on the appropriateness of providing a defibrillator in the Council Offices.

HH106 **HALF-YEAR HOMELESSNESS STATISTICS**

Members received a report setting out the numbers of people presenting as homeless from 1 April 2005 to 3 September 2005. The report detailed the reasons for their homelessness, their status and the number of homeless applications that had been accepted or rejected. Officers said that a press release would be issued to help improve public understanding of the homelessness situation.

HH107 **TENANT FORUM MINUTES**

The Committee received, for information, the Minutes of the Tenant Forum meeting held on 10 October 2005. Mrs Bolvig-Hansen advised Members of the decision of the Forum that Councillors would not be invited to attend future meetings for the time being.

Councillor Flack suggested that when clear bags were left out containing clothes, a replacement bag should be provided. The Chairman confirmed that this issue would be referred to the appropriate officer.

HH108 **HOUSING STRATEGY WORKING GROUP**

The Executive Manager (Housing Services) reported on the matters which had been considered at the last meeting of the Housing Strategy Working Group. He said that the Housing Strategy statement/business plan would be submitted to GO-East within the next two or three months. He added that the working group had also considered the planned programme of works.

HH109 **REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION**

Members considered a report setting out the details of the implications of the new constitution for the Community Committee. It was noted that the current functions of the Health and Housing Committee would transfer to the new Community Committee and there would also be significant other

responsibilities for that Committee. It was intended that tenant participation would be continued and the same Tenant Forum representatives would be invited to attend that Committee.

Councillor Flack pointed out that the report suggested that the new arrangements would require officer attendance at more meetings. She also said that if housing issues were being discussed at area panels, the tenant representatives should have the right to attend.

Mrs Bolvig-Hansen said that the Tenant Forums had not been made aware of the proposed new constitution and she was upset that they had not been advised that the Health and Housing Committee would no longer exist. Councillor Bayley said that she had spoken to the Chief Executive and he had confirmed that two representatives of the Tenant Forum would continue to be invited to the Community Committee in the same way as at present. He had also informed her that the issue of representation of area panels would be looked at in the future.

Councillor Lemon said that he was concerned that tenants had not been involved when Members had been told that there had been wide consultation.

Councillor Hibbs apologised if the matter had caused any distress to the tenants, but assured Mrs Bolvig-Hansen that their voice would continue to be heard.

Councillor Bayley said that whilst she accepted the decision of the Tenant Forum that Councillors should not attend their meetings, she felt that it would be helpful if Councillors could attend the meetings prior to rent setting and Mrs Bolvig-Hansen said that she would take this matter up with the Tenant Forum.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Housing Strategy Working Group continues to meet on an occasional basis to consider, in detail, specific issues and make recommendations to the Community Committee. The future need for this Working Group to be reviewed by the Council at its annual meeting in 2006.
- 2 the newly appointed Homelessness Task Group continues to meet to consider the specific issues relating to homelessness provision in the District until it makes a final report/recommendation to the Community Committee. The future life of the Task Group to be reviewed by the Community Committee after the annual Council meeting in 2006.
- 3 the Tenant Forum be invited to send two representatives (one being the Chair) to attend the Community Committee in a non-voting capacity.
- 4 the annual rents setting meeting for 2006/07 be dealt with during a normal meeting of the Community Committee.

- 5 any presentation takes place prior to the meetings of the Community Committee allowing meetings to commence at 7.30 pm.
- 6 the Community Committee advises Officers to notify Members of issues 'for noting' in the Members Bulletin.
- 7 the area panels consider the most appropriate way of involving Tenant Forum representatives at their meetings.

HH110

HOMELESSNESS TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

The Committee received a report setting out the Council's current position on the use of Council accommodation and designated units of registered social landlord (RSL) accommodation as temporary accommodation for homeless applicants. Members were advised that by using some hard to let accommodation as temporary accommodation for homeless applicants, the Council had been able to reduce the use and cost of accommodating families in bed and breakfast and had provided them with more suitable self-contained accommodation.

Officers explained that the intention was to provide settled homes for people who were currently in temporary accommodation and prevent further social exclusion by moving them from communities where they had become settled. It was also intended to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation in line with the Government stated aim of reducing by 50% the number of households in temporary accommodation by 2010. As an indirect consequence, there could be some savings to the Council as there would be a slight reduction in void turnover.

Finally, it was also intended to meet the Government's new BVPI introduced in April 2005 which measured the percentage change in the average number of families placed in temporary accommodation. A risk analysis had been undertaken and details were reported to Members.

RESOLVED that the Committee agrees:-

- 1 to convert a limited number of units of temporary accommodation into permanent tenancies within the Council's own stock.
- 2 to consult with the involved RSL to convert a number of their current temporary tenancies (assured short hold tenancies) to permanent assured tenancies.

HH111

LAST MEETING

Councillor Bayley said that this would be the last meeting of the Health and Housing Committee and she thanked the Chairman, Members and officers for all their hard work over the years.

The meeting ended at 9.10 pm.