

HOMELESSNESS TASK GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 2.00 pm on 9 FEBRUARY 2006

Present:- Councillor M A Hibbs – Chairman.
Councillors C A Bayley, R M Lemon, S Flack.

Also present:- Councillor D J Morson.

Tenant Forum Representative:- Mrs J Bolvig-Hansen.

Officers in attendance:- R Chamberlain, E Petrie, J Snares and P Snow.

HG2 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2005 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HG3 **RESEARCH RELATING TO HOMELESSNESS PROVISION**

The Executive Manager (Housing Services) introduced the discussion by referring to the urgency of the problems posed by homelessness and said that this had now assumed a higher profile on the Council's agenda. He anticipated that the Task Group would be in a position to submit a proposal to the Community Committee later this year.

Councillor Bayley expressed concerns about the timetable for obtaining access to Supporting People funding. The Executive Manager (Housing Services) commented that it now appeared harder than before to obtain money from Supporting People and it was essential before a bid was submitted to prepare a fully costed scheme. This could be achieved by discussion at officer level with representatives from Supporting People.

Councillor Morson felt that this matter should be examined in a structural manner and not in isolation and that Members who may not be familiar with the problems posed by homelessness should be given sufficient information to enable any proposal being submitted to be seen in the wider context of the Council's responsibilities. The Executive Manager (Housing Services) agreed and said that there were a number of housing issues that would need pulling together within a coherent policy context and the work of this Task Group was part of that broader picture.

Members then turned to consideration of the report prepared for this meeting. The report contained the results of research carried out in discussion with Babergh, Braintree, Breckland, East Cambridgeshire, Epping Forest, Maldon, Mid Suffolk and South Cambridgeshire District Councils. The Senior Housing Officer reported that all but one of the authorities canvassed had made some provision for hostel type accommodation. This greatly limited, but did not totally prevent, the use of bed and breakfast accommodation in emergency circumstances.

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It was agreed that the Council should aim towards the following targets:-

- The ending of bed and breakfast for families and pregnant women except for short-term emergency use.
- The provision of suitable supported accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds.
- Support for all homeless clients placed by the Council.
- A significant reduction in the use of bed and breakfast for all client groups.

A series of options were identified for achieving these objectives and the Task Group considered the merits of each of these in turn, some of which had been identified at the previous meeting. The report also included a summary of current bed and breakfast usage in Uttlesford and it appeared that the average number of homeless cases dealt with in this way at any one time was generally in the region of ten. Members noted the very significant cost involved in supporting the use of bed and breakfast accommodation and the possible intention of the Government to phase out the use of bed and breakfast altogether.

In relation to the problem of making provision for homeless 16 and 17 year olds, Councillor Flack suggested that the Council might consider some joint work with another local housing authority as well as the possible use of a foster care scheme in co-operation with other key agencies. She also thought that the system of floating support might be extended to help 16 and 17 year olds in housing difficulty if funding were available. Members were advised that the Council had previously worked with Braintree District Council to reduce bed and breakfast accommodation. There was possible scope for future joint working arrangements between Braintree and Uttlesford.

Members discussed the considerations that would be involved in running a hostel and the level of support that would be required. The Chairman said that the level of demand for hostel accommodation might be hard to predict as he suspected that many homeless young people in Uttlesford migrated to surrounding towns and cities. He also suggested that consideration should be given to the housing needs of a wider age group than 16 and 17 year olds.

Consideration was given to the needs of younger single people living in a variety of types of accommodation. There was general agreement that a good level of social support was needed and that this could be provided in a variety of ways. Generally speaking, the option of supported accommodation was favoured.

There was also a brief discussion about possible links with the use of accommodation owned and rented out by the British Airports Authority in the vicinity of Stansted Airport. The Executive Manager (Housing Services) reported that BAA had taken a decision to terminate joint discussions with the Council

There might also be the scope to develop new social housing opportunities through the judicious use of Section 106 Agreements. The Executive

Manager (Housing Services) said that he would pursue this idea further with the Housing Strategy Manager. He expressed concerns about a connection between homelessness and anti social behaviour in some cases and said this had become a serious problem.

He suggested that the Task Group should be in a position to make a detailed proposal to the Community Committee during the September/October cycle of meetings as part of a more general housing policy. An interim report would be made to the June meeting to flag up some proposals for possible future policy development.

To assist Members in developing these ideas into more definite proposals, it was suggested that visits should be arranged to at least two nearby authorities that were operating hostel type accommodation units. After due consideration, it was felt that Babergh and Mid Suffolk should be approached with a view to organising visits within the next few weeks.

In conclusion, the Task Group agreed that officers should concentrate on the following matters for future consideration:-

- 1 The suitability of providing a small general homeless hostel, with support provided by part time staff, but with 24 hour emergency cover, for use by families, single people and 16/17 year olds.
- 2 Designating and furnishing existing properties for emergency use as homeless accommodation, together with floating support where needed.
- 3 The consideration of utilising Section 106 agreements more extensively for the provision of social housing accommodation.
- 4 Continuing research into social housing accommodation provided by other local housing authorities.
- 5 Continuing discussions, at officer level, with Supporting People to identify opportunities for projects attracting specific funding.
- 6 An examination of the possibility of using the fostering system for the benefit of 16 and 17 year olds.
- 7 Flagging up with the Executive Manager (Finance and Asset Strategy) future financial provision needed to pursue these ideas.

It was agreed that a report would be made to the Tenant Forum once further information had been gathered.

The meeting ended at 3.20 pm.