

HOMELESSNESS TASK GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 2.00 pm on 2 MAY 2006

Present:- Councillor M A Hibbs – Chairman.
Councillors C A Bayley and R M Lemon.

Also present:- Councillor D J Morson.

Tenant Forum Representative:- Mrs J Bolvig-Hansen.

Officers in attendance:- R Chamberlain, S Clarke, V Harvey, E Petrie and J Snares.

Apologies:- Councillor Flack

HG4

MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2006 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HG5

HOMELESSNESS – RECOMMENDATION TO COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

The Senior Housing Officer had prepared a report with recommendations to make to the Community Committee. The task group were looking at the current provision of homelessness accommodation within Uttlesford and considering what future provision might be required by the authority.

As part of its research the group had visited Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils to see what provisions they had made. The Senior Housing Officer said that Babergh District Council owned a hostel in Sudbury which had 25 rooms housing families and single people; Members felt this was too large, had poor facilities and not a friendly atmosphere. Babergh Council also felt the same which was why it planned to close this particular facility. Babergh also ran a 5 bedroom hostel in Hadleigh which Councillors felt was a more appropriate size.

A visit was also made to Mid Suffolk Council's five bedroom hostel in Stowmarket. It was agreed that this worked very well as it looked like a house, was clean, had good facilities, had a good atmosphere and was run by two very dedicated members of staff. Councillor Lemon said this was an ideal scenario that Uttlesford should look to achieve.

The Executive Manager (Housing Services) said creating a large homeless hostel would not be appropriate for Uttlesford. He felt that something needed to be created for short term stays that was discretely placed in the community with a high level of staffing. Mrs Bolvig-Hansen said the average stay in the Stowmarket hostel was 12 to 13 weeks and that she would not want to see stays and longer than this in anything Uttlesford set up.

The Senior Housing Officer also reported that she had recently attended a Multi Agency meeting where the setting up of a Nightstop scheme in Uttlesford was discussed. This was a scheme where families offered emergency

accommodation to young homeless people. The idea being that they were accommodated in a family environment for a few nights whilst support agencies tried to resolve their situation or found them alternative accommodation. This scheme had proved successful in other areas.

Councillor Morson congratulated all involved and said he would like to see this as a prominent role within the community.

The Executive Manager (Housing Services) said UDC were in the early stages and would be taking the lead on co-ordinating the work of this group of agencies with key support from St Matthews Housing.

The task group had acknowledged the problem of homelessness and the need to end the use of bed and breakfast and agreed a course of action to recommend to the Community Committee. The Executive Manager (Housing Services) stated recommendations would go to the June meeting of the Community Committee and would hopefully see some further progress by September.

Members asked for points of clarity. Mrs Bolvig-Hansen asked if the hostel would be located in Saffron Walden. The group said this would not necessarily be the case; a few small units could, as one plan, be located in the areas that needed them. The Senior Housing Officer said units would provide temporary accommodation as part of the process of finding permanent accommodation for homeless people.

Members wished to avoid the terms 'hostel' and 'homelessness' as these held a negative stigma.

RESOLVED that the task group recommend to the Community Committee that:

1. there is proven need for more appropriate homelessness accommodation to be provided by the Council
2. that the Community Committee authorises officers to investigate and report back with proposals on how this Council can provide suitable homelessness accommodation at the earliest opportunity
3. that Officers continue to work with other agencies to try to resolve the problem of finding short term accommodation for young homeless people
4. the work of the Task Group is now completed.

The meeting ended at 2.45pm.