

**HOUSING INITIATIVE TASK GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 10.00am on 12
NOVEMBER 2007**

Present: Councillor R H Chamberlain – Chairman
Councillors E L Bellingham-Smith, J E Hudson,
J E Menell and D J Morson

Tenant Forum representatives: Mrs D Cornell and Mr S Sproul

Officers present: S Clarke, R Goodey, H Joy, R Millership, J Snares
and P Snow

HTG14 **APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor E W Hicks.

HTG15 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2007 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the substitution of Vicarage Mead for Thaxted Day Centre in the second paragraph of Minute HTG9(b).

HTG16 **BUSINESS ARISING**

(i) **Minute HTG4 – Choice based lettings**

It was reported that there had been a steady flow of interest in the new allocations policy introduced earlier in the month. Uttlesford's leading role in the Essex consortium had been acknowledged by the other authorities in helping to drive the project forward.

(ii) **Minute HTG6 – Tenant elections**

Members noted that nominations had now been received to fill all of the vacancies on the tenant forum. It was encouraging to note that there were now seven new members. One further nomination had been received after the closing date and it was suggested that the person concerned would be invited to attend meetings as a non-voting observer.

Councillor Menell asked that Buffy Bus should be used at every possible opportunity.

(iii) **Minute HTG7 – Negative housing subsidy**

A letter had now been sent by the Chief Executive in pursuance of the motion approved by the Community Committee.

A letter had not yet been sent to all tenants as agreed at the last meeting because of a concentration on other issues but it was proposed either to incorporate a letter and petition into the next

tenants' newsletter or arrange for a separate letter to be sent in January.

Members noted that the housing subsidy figures were not now expected to be received from the Government until the New Year. The Chairman said that this delay was unacceptable and the Task group agreed that representations should be made deploring the lateness of the information needed for rent setting and other Housing Revenue Account purposes.

(iv) Minute HTG12(a) – Remodelling sheltered accommodation

The Chairman reported that a meeting had been requested by Councillor Barker to consider options for the re-development of Holloway Crescent, Leaden Roding. She had asked that the Chairman of the Parish Council be invited to attend to outline the Parish Council's views.

The Head of Housing Management suggested the meeting took place at Holloway Crescent and could incorporate a site inspection. This would enable Members to assess the various options for re-development. The future of Mead Court at Stansted was now equally pressing and it was agreed that the meeting would include a site inspection there also. The timetable for the meeting on Monday, 10 December would be:

- 10.00am – inspection of Mead Court.
- 11.15am – arrival at Holloway Crescent
- 11.30am – meet with interested residents of Holloway Crescent, including the Parish Council Chairman and Councillor Barker
- 12.00 noon – meeting of the Task Group

HTG17

HOUSING STRATEGY ACTION PLAN UPDATE/NEW HOMELESS STRATEGY

The Chairman summarised the programme of future actions and said that the new homeless strategy and housing strategy would have to be agreed by next July. These documents should contain a record of achievements to date, be written in plain English, and clearly state current policy in a way that would allow changes to be made.

The Senior Housing Officer gave a homelessness update and tabled a list of current priorities. She said the intention was to produce a smart action plan with realistic and achievable targets.

Mrs Cornell said she had found the recent homeless strategy partners' workshop to be very worthwhile. One message that had emerged clearly from the workshop was the need for a one stop shop. Councillor Morson thought the list was a blueprint for future policy and for consolidation into a programme of actions.

Members agreed the priorities list was an excellent summary but highlighted problems encountered in working with other agencies. Future discussions would be needed with the County Council in particular with a view to achieving a supply of appropriate accommodation.

The Housing and Planning Policy Manager presented a housing strategy action plan update as prepared for inspection by the Audit Commission. The Task Group considered each aspect of the action plan in turn and discussed how to proceed. It was noted that every household would be consulted about the Local Development Framework and this would help to develop an understanding of housing need.

A Strategic Housing Market Assessment (a new form of housing needs survey) would be carried out with partner authorities during 2008. A survey was being carried out in individual parishes to ensure that new affordable rural housing schemes adequately addressed local housing need and the results of this would be available in January.

Councillor Menell stated that the meeting of North Area Panel in January would consider local housing need and it was intended to invite representatives from the Rural Housing Trust to attend.

Members discussed the general content and layout of the strategy. The Housing and planning Policy Manager said that the Government now required a lighter touch approach from authorities. This would involve the inclusion of much less detail and a concentration upon specific targets and outcomes. There was a strong encouragement for enhanced partnership working. In effect, there would be a bridging strategy produced in the same format for a number of housing authorities throughout the region.

It was agreed that officers should aim to submit an initial draft of the strategy to this group in March 2008. This would fit in with the timetable for the Audit inspection in January and would enable feedback from that process to be reported to Members.

The Head of Housing Management said that the existence of the Task Group was considered helpful to the management of housing matters within the Council. The absence of a housing task group would be likely to affect the Audit Commission's rating of the Council's performance.

It was agreed that the Task Group should meet at 10.00am on 8 January 2008 to discuss rent setting. That meeting would be able to take account of any recommendations from the Tenant Panel meeting the day before. Any recommendation would be reported to the Community Committee on 24 January.

Finally, it was reported that the Audit Commission had asked to meet members of the Task Group. For this purpose, a self assessment would shortly be forwarded to all Task Group members. Audit

Commission representatives would also meet with the chairmen and vice-chairmen of the Community and Scrutiny committees.

The Audit Commission recognised that the Council's overall financial difficulties would restrict prospects for improvement in the housing service.

The meeting ended at 11.35am.