

**HOUSING SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE held at 7.30 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD  
SAFFRON WALDEN on 1 FEBRUARY 2000**

Present:- Councillor R W L Stone - Chairman.  
Councillors Mrs C A Bayley, R A E Clifford, R C Dean, R D Green, M A Hibbs, A J Ketteridge,  
R A Merrion, A R Row and G Sell.

Also present:- Councillor R P Chambers.

Tenant Panel Representatives:- Mr Smith and Mrs Bolvig-Hansen.

Officers in attendance:- R Chamberlain, Mrs M Cox, J B Dickson,  
D Demery, Mrs A Dellow, M R Dellow, Ms H Frost and M T Purkiss.

I. **APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mrs C M Little.

I. **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 1999 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

I. **BUSINESS ARISING**

(i) **Minute HS54 (iii) - Play Area, Auton Croft**

Officers reported that they were still waiting for the official view from Saffron Walden Town Council regarding taking responsibility for the land at Auton Croft, Saffron Walden.

(ii) **Minute HS60 - Bromfield, Saffron Walden**

It was reported that the planning application for the site had now been submitted. Officers would be meeting with residents in the forthcoming week to explain the background of, and proposals for, the proposed development. Ward Members were invited to attend this meeting.

I. **TENANT PANEL MEETINGS**

The Sub-Committee received the Minutes of the recent meetings of the South and North Uttlesford Tenant Panels, Minutes of a housing presentation held on 13 December 1999 and of a Joint Panel meeting to discuss the proposed rent increases held on 24 January 2000.

I. **RE-EXAMINATION OF DRAFT REVENUE ESTIMATES 2000/01**

At the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee on 11 January 2000 it had been recommended that Sub-Committees and Committees be instructed to re-examine their estimates, rank growth items in priority order and to look seriously at any possible efficiency savings. Members were advised that there were no growth items suggested for this Sub-Committee. Also, the only items which were under the Sub-Committee's direct control were benefits and Grants which were to be reviewed in the first year of the Best Value process. It was therefore

RESOLVED that the Policy and Resources Committee be advised that, because of the very small budget within its direct control, the Sub-Committee endorse the officers' view that no efficiency savings could be identified at this time.

I. **DRAFT HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT ESTIMATES AND RENT SETTING 2000/01**

The Corporate Director - Finance presented a detailed report which set out the draft estimates for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and went on to explain that the determination of the rent level for 2000/01. The estimate 2000/01 for the direct costs of management and maintenance excluding internal charges showed an increase of £117,190 against the adjusted 1999/00 original estimates and the major variations were explained.

The report then considered the proposed increase of some miscellaneous rents and charges for the coming year. There was a case for reducing heating charges to tenants on communal boiler systems by about £6,000. It was also proposed to increase the current weekly rent of garages to produce about £6,000 in additional income and restore the relative rental position of garages compared with dwellings.

The DETR had issued its final rent guidance and subsequent determinations for 2000/01 on 20 December 1999. At the national level it had determined a guideline rent increase level of 4.5%. This would produce an average increased rent of £2.12 per week for Uttlesford tenants, the equivalent of 4.3% on the current assessed average rent of £49.23. This figure had been used in calculating housing subsidy implications. The report went on to explain the impact of the DETR subsidy rules and the possible implications of the new financial framework for housing which would take effect from April 2001.

The detailed figures attached to the report showed an overall operating deficit of £169,070 for 2000/01, even with a net rent increase at the guideline 4.3%. The primary reason for this position was that when rents were set last year, the rent multiplier had been reduced by the Policy and Resources Committee. The Council was now required to rectify the deficit position and had the choice of either increasing rents or reducing expenditure. One option could be a temporary, managed reduction in the repairs programme in the period up to 31 March 2001. This was possible because the Government's proposed new financial framework for housing offered the prospect of increased funding for repairs after 1 April 2001.

Members expressed concern at the degree of central Government influence over the level of rent increase.

The Tenant Panels had been consulted on the suggested 4.3% level of rent increase and had been in agreement.

The Sub-Committee then discussed the proposed increase in garage rents. There was some feeling that the rents were on the low side compared to rents in the private sector. Mrs Bolvig-Hansen said that the Tenant Panels had requested a report on this matter to one of their forthcoming meetings.

Councillor Hibbs asked about the efficiency of sewerage plants, in terms of the cost effectiveness of the number of houses connected. The Property Services Manager would reply to him direct on this matter.

RECOMMENDED that the Policy and Resources Committee

- 1 to set the budget for 2000/01
  - (a) accept the estimates as presented on the basis of an average weekly rent increase of £2.12 in line with the DETR guideline equivalent to 4.3%
  - (b) revise heating charges as detailed in paragraph 13 of the report in accordance with the recommendations of the auditors to produce a reduction in income of £6,000
  - (c) increase garage rents from £3.80 to £4.00 per week to produce additional income of £6,000
  - (d) increase sewerage charges to tenants where necessary, up to the percentage decided for a dwelling rent increase.
- 2 to address the overall shortfall of £169,070 in the budget
  - (a) permission should be sought from the Secretary of State to transfer up to £75,000 from DSO balances to the HRA in preference to the benefit going to the general fund
  - (b) any remaining shortfall should be found from a managed temporary reduction in the repairs programme for 2000/01.
- 3 increase the dwelling rent multiplier from 1.958 to 2.042, to produce a rent increase of 4.3% in line with DETR guidelines

## I. **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES SERVICE STATEMENTS**

The Sub-Committee received Equal Opportunity Service Statements for the Housing Services and Property Services Business Centres. The purpose of the statements was to ensure that all possible customers of the service were able to access the service. The statements appended to the report identified areas of the services that were thought to require attention in 2000/01.

In answer to a question, the Housing Services Manager confirmed that Tenant Panel meetings had been scheduled at all the Council's sheltered complexes for the forthcoming year. Councillor Hibbs raised the issue of opening the Council Offices on Saturday mornings. It was noted that this was a corporate issue. In answer to a question from Councillor Green, the Property Services Manager, agreed to look at the future implications of the Disability Discrimination Act.

RESOLVED that the Equal Opportunities Service Statements for Housing Services and Property Services be approved.

## I. **COMMON HOUSING REGISTER**

The Sub-Committee was advised that one of the targets within the current Housing Strategy Statement was to investigate the possibility of introducing a Common Housing Register. This was an arrangement between a local housing authority and registered social landlords (RSL), which operated in the District, to collectively receive applications for housing and to register the housing needs using a common administrative procedure. There were currently 13 RSL's operating and managing approximately just 750 properties in the District whilst the Council owned the majority of the Social Housing with over 3,100 properties.

All partner RSLs had been involved in a working party, at officer level, that the Council had set up to consider this issue. It had become apparent, that one organisation, most likely the Council, would have to take on the administrative responsibilities, and there would be cost and time implications. It had also been established that as most of the RSLs were not based in the District some did not keep a separate waiting list for Uttlesford. Therefore when a vacancy occurred the Council was often asked to provide a nomination in addition to the normal quota and, in reality the Council's register was already acting as a Common Housing Register. At the last meeting of the Working Party it had been concluded that there was no current need to introduce a CHR as the present system was working very well. However the process would continue to be monitored and should the situation alter there might be a need for a further review.

The Sub-Committee was pleased that this matter had been looked at thoroughly and it had been found that the current system was working well. Councillor Clifford suggested giving a leaflet to applicants to the Council's waiting list advising them of contact numbers for the Registered Social Landlords operating in the District.

RESOLVED that the Council does not participate in a Common Housing Register and the current system continue to be monitored.

## I. **IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM ACT 1999**

The Sub-Committee received a report which advised of new consortium arrangements for the dispersal of asylum seekers within the UK in accordance with the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. Discussions were taking place at officer level within the Eastern Region Consortium to ascertain the possible impact for Uttlesford. When further information was available it would be supplied to Members of the Council.

## I. **HOMELESSNESS REPORT**

Members received details of the homelessness situation for the period 1 April 1999 to 1 January 2000. Councillor Hibbs drew attention to the large percentage of homeless cases being referred due to health or returning from institutional care and asked whether the Council had appropriate accommodation for these people. The Housing Services Manager agreed that the need for accommodation for single vulnerable people was a real issue in the District. Officers were currently looking at alternative schemes/projects and would report to a future meeting.

**I. THE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 1999/2000 AND PROPOSED PROGRAMMES FOR 2000/2001**

The Sub-Committee was updated on the progress of the Development Programme for 1999/2000 as at 1 January 2000 and the Development Programme for 2000/2001. Members discussed the problems in obtaining social housing in large planning schemes.

**I. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

RESOLVED that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 7 and 8 of part 1 of Schedule 12(A) of the Act.

**I. TENDERS****(i) Contract No: U/CON.504 - Replacement Windows**

Tenders for replacement windows to 38 dwellings at Manor Road Stansted had been invited from four contractors. Four tenders had been received and it was noted that the lowest tender by Asset Manufacturing PLC in the sum of £73,512.77 had been accepted.

**(ii) Contract No. U/CON.498 - Electrical Rewiring**

Tenders for the rewiring of 65 dwellings at Felsted, Farnham, Little Easton, Hatfield Heath, Littlebury, Newport, Stansted and Wimbish had been invited from four contractors. Two tenders had been received and it was noted that the lowest tender by Butcher Electrical Services Ltd in the sum of £78,809.50 had been accepted.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm.