

HOUSING SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE held at 7.30 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 5 JUNE 2001

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, Mrs C M Little, R A Merrion, A R Row and G Sell.

Also present:- Councillor D M Miller.

Tenant Panel Representative:- Mr Smith.

Officers in attendance:- R Chamberlain, M Dellow, D Demery, Ms H Frost, B D Perkins, Mrs J Postings and Mrs C Roberts.

HS53 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2001 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HS54 FUTURE MANAGEMENT OF THE COUNCIL'S HOUSING STOCK

The Housing Services Manager explained that two reports from HACAS (the Council's Housing Consultants) had been commissioned for advice on housing stock options for the future management of the stock as a part of Best Value Review . He stressed that it was now a requirement of Government that the Council had to consider this issue annually.

The report described the housing stock as currently being in good condition and showed that tenant satisfaction with the service was high. "Catch-up" repairs, a necessary feature of transfer packages, would affect transfer price and in the HACAS report reference had been made to possible "catch-up" repairs which would be necessary as part of a transfer package and this had been taken into account in the assumption.

The Housing Services Manager described the possible consequences of stock transfer in terms of size of capital receipt and possible options for use of the receipt. These included a percentage being spent on the provision of new social housing options through a housing association. Any receipt spent in this way would be refunded to the District Council by the Housing Corporation by way of the "double spend" arrangements.

The Housing Services Manager explained that the law requires rents to come into line with RSL rents over a ten-year period, whoever is the landlord.

The HACAS' conclusions stressed that since the stock was currently in reasonable condition there appeared to be no immediate need for the Council to make a swift decision about transfer. Whilst transfer was feasible for Uttlesford, the Council could remain a successful landlord for the foreseeable future and be able to carry out its planned programme. Review

would probably be needed of the Council's capital expenditure priorities and housing revenue expenditure as regards future investment in stock.

It was reported that production of the Council's thirty year housing business plan was well developed, and that an annual review would follow. This document would be very relevant to future housing policy planning.

As the Business Plan was based on Officers projections of resources needed to keep the stock up to its present condition, it was pointed out that there was some difference between the Council's figures and those of HACAS.

The report discussed the possibility of two options of a) retention of stock with annual review of the policy and b) transfer of stock to a new registered social landlord.

The report outlined reasons for and against each option.

Transfer would require an application under the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions transfer programme which would require a ballot of tenants. Recent ballots had shown mixed results. Cost and time implications were substantial. Tenants' views on this process were critical. The current strong opposition to transfer from tenant panel representatives was seen as a major factor in this issue. The Housing Services Manager reported that at a special tenants meeting held recently all tenant representatives had supported the recommendation. He also recommended that a decision be taken to end current uncertainty for tenants and staff.

Accordingly, Officers were recommending the Sub-Committee to make no immediate decision on transfer but to review the issue annually as part of the housing strategy and the 30 year housing business plan process.

Councillor A R Row stated that there was a gap between what was necessary for maintenance and what could be done. He considered that tenants had a good service and that there were sufficient homes for the future generation but not for single people and young couples. Money released by transfer could be put into a building programme for those who wished to stay in their home villages and towns. He therefore proposed that officers prepare a pamphlet on transfer seeking the views of all tenants. Councillor M A Hibbs spoke in favour of the recommendation on the report, stressing that building of more housing stock was difficult because of planning policies and shortage of available land. He pointed out that it would be a pity to exchange current stock which was good quality and in good condition for a later purchase of poor quality accommodation. Retention of stock, he suggested, was best value for the tenants.

Other Members felt that it was important to consider the interests of all Council Tax payers which might also be served by investment of capital to keep Council tax low.

A Member suggested that sale of houses without replacement was an unacceptable route. Another Member felt that more financial facts were needed for this decision.

Councillor D M Miller pointed out the effect upon staff of annual discussion of this matter. Councillor M A Hibbs, however, emphasised the value of annual review which provided consensus management.

The proposal of Councillor A R Row was put to the vote and lost.

RESOLVED that the Sub-Committee indicates that its preferred option is to make no immediate decision to transfer the Council's stock but to keep the issue under annual review as part of the housing strategy/30 year housing business plan process.

HS55 **2000/01 HOUSING SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE - BUDGET MONITORING**

The Sub-Committee received a budget monitoring report dealing with the provisional out turn for 2000/01 as against the 2000/01 revised budget, on the basis of financial information as at 9 May 2001 before close of the accounts. The updated position would be presented to the Policy and Resources Committee on 19 June 2001 and the statement of accounts to the meeting of the Resources Committee on 20 September 2001.

Variations included an overspend on homelessness of £23,000 due to a more complex caseload which had necessitated accommodation outside the catchment area. In addition, the net cost of housing benefits remained the major potential source of budget variation. Quantification of this was not possible until subsidy entitlement became known at the time of closing of accounts. The current position therefore showed an identified overspend of £23,000 with possible further housing benefit related variations.

HS56 **MINUTES OF THE TENANT PANEL MEETING**

The Sub-Committee received the Minutes of the North Tenant Panel meeting held on 12 March 2001 and the South Tenant Panel meeting held on 19 March 2001.

As regards the meeting of the South Tenant panel, Councillor M A Hibbs stressed that he and Councillor Mrs C M Little were present at the invitation of the Tenant Panel.

Councillor R A E Clifford requested that in the Minutes individuals' names should include their surnames.

HS57 **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 items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of

Exempt Information as defined in paragraphs 7 and 8 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

HS58

OAKROYD HOUSE GREAT DUNMOW

The report advised Members of the current situation regarding the future of the Council's Sheltered Housing Scheme at Oakroyd House in Great Dunmow and recommended that the Scheme be transferred to a Housing Association subject to terms and conditions being approved.

The Housing Services Manager described the consultation with the tenants, negotiations with registered social landlords and tenants about possible refurbishment and redevelopment, and evaluation of proposals received from four partner registered social landlords. He explained the financial consequences likely from adopting the optimum proposal.

Some Members commented favourably upon the proposal and Councillor Mrs C M Little informed the meeting that residents had been most impressed with the way Mr Chamberlain and his staff had handled this whole matter.

RECOMMENDED that, subject to all financial and legal terms and conditions being agreed and a positive ballot of tenants, Oakroyd House, Great Dunmow, be transferred to Swan Housing Association to enable the extensive refurbishment and expansion of the Scheme to be undertaken.

HS59

TENDERS – MODERNISATION OF 1 3 4 AND 6 WOODSIDE RICKLING GREEN AND 23 FRAMBURY LANE NEWPORT

Councillor M A Hibbs declared an interest in this item and left the room for the discussion of the item.

The Sub-Committee received a report on tenders for the above works received from approved contractors.

The Sub-Committee was informed that the tender submitted by J C Gowers Ltd had been accepted and work ordered to start.

The meeting ended at 8.35 pm.