

**HOUSING STRATEGY WORKING PARTY held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 2.30 pm on 11 SEPTEMBER
2003**

Present:- Councillors C A Bayley, W F Bowker and R M Lemon and
Mrs J Bolvig-Hansen (Tenant Panel representative).

Officers present:- R Chamberlain, W Cockerell, A Collison, H Frost,
R Harborough, R Millership and P Snow.

HWP4

HOUSING STRATEGY STATEMENT 2004-2007

A draft of the Housing Strategy Statement 2004 – 2007 was submitted for consideration. It was intended that the document would be submitted for approval during the next committee cycle to the Health and Housing Committee and to Full Council and thereafter to GO-East. In the meantime, the draft document would be submitted to the GO-East office for interim response and comment.

The Head of Housing Services explained that the figures included in the draft document had been taken from the budget book but that there were some unknown quantities at this stage in view of the uncertainties caused by new housing finance arrangements. The Chief Accountant would update the figures in the Strategy Statement when opportunity permitted, but a further meeting of the Working Party would be held only if absolutely necessary. Such a meeting would be triggered by either significant amendments suggested by GO-East or if financial data was much different to the provisional figures.

He referred to the changed format and revamped appearance of the Strategy Statement designed to fit in with GO-East guidance and thanked the Housing Enabling Officer and the Programme Officer for their sustained hard work in completing both this document and the 30 Year Housing Business Plan document.

It was also noted that the Council had succeeded in achieving an average rating for the Strategy Statement submitted to GO-East last year. This maintained the improvement from the below average rating achieved two years ago and indicated that the Council was heading in the right direction as far as its strategy documentation was concerned.

The Working Party proceeded to give detailed consideration to the draft Strategy Statement on a section by section basis, and made a number of editorial suggestions for changes to the document prior to its submission. During the course of the discussion, particular emphasis was given to the question of planned household growth and the connected availability of affordable housing and to difficulties associated with managing the Council's housing stock.

Consideration was given to the method by which leaseholders could be consulted and/or represented. Members noted that leaseholders had declined the opportunity to establish a formal leaseholder forum. It was felt

that it might be appropriate instead to invite leaseholders to meet together to elect a representative who could attend the proposed tenants' forum for the consideration only of those matters directly affecting leaseholders. It was agreed that further consultation with leaseholders would be carried out on the basis of this suggestion.

Some concern was expressed about the extent of under-occupation of Council dwellings. It was agreed that consideration should be given to how under-occupation could best be tackled. The Head of Housing Services suggested that a survey could be carried out in either one or two selected parishes in order to identify those factors that might provide an incentive for tenants of under occupied dwellings to move to smaller accommodation. He would ask the Housing Enabling Officer to insert a suitable sentence in the Strategy Statement committing the Council to undertaking a survey of this nature. Members supported this suggestion and agreed that Hatfield Broad Oak and Newport might prove suitable parishes for such a survey to be conducted.

The Working Party noted that if a further meeting was required it was likely to be at short notice.

RECOMMENDED that the Council and the Health and Housing Committee be invited to approve the Housing Strategy Statement 2004 – 07, in principle, subject to the changes incorporated at this meeting, and that the document be formally submitted to GO-East in due course.

The meeting ended at 4.00 pm.