

**SHELTERED HOUSING TASK GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 10.00am on 18 FEBRUARY 2011**

Present: Councillors E Bellingham-Smith, J E Hudson and
S V Schneider.

Also attending: Uttlesford District Council officers: Jack Burnham
(Housing Enabling Officer), Heather Duncan (Sheltered
Housing Officer), Helen Harvey (Senior Sheltered
Housing and Lifeline Officer), Nicole Shephard Lewis
(Tenant Participation Officer), Roz Millership (Divisional
Head: Housing and Environmental Services), Liz Petrie
(Housing Management Manager), Catharine Roberts
(Democratic Services Officer), Sue Russell (Lifeline
Officer).
Forum representatives: John Maddams and Paul
Simpson.

SH34 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that Councillor S V Schneider be elected chairman for the
meeting.

SH35 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor D J Morson, Maureen
Cox and Suzanna Westwood.

SH36 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2010 were signed by the
Chairman as a correct record.

SH37 LEAD OFFICER'S REPORT

The Housing Management Manager reminded Members of the Task Group
that she had been asked at the September 2010 meeting to seek out possible
changes in service provision for the Council's most vulnerable clients in the
light of potential cuts to the Supporting People (SP) grant, then expected to be
in the order of 11%.

Since then, Officers had attended a meeting at Essex County Council where it
had become clear that there would be cuts in 2011/12 of 25% of the SP grant
with a further 5% in the following year. The potential disruption to the
Sheltered and Lifeline services was severe.

The District Council had been the first authority in Essex to implement a Hub
and Spoke system, at the initiative of SP. In the light of the proposed cuts,

however it would be impossible to take the service out to the wider community as had been the ambition. It seemed that the Group would have to take some very hard decisions.

Members noted the report expressing understanding for the task.

SH38

PROGRAMME OF WORKS

The Housing Management Manager referred the Group to the programme of works which had been circulated with the agenda.

The Housing Management Manager explained the need for an Elderly Persons Housing Strategy and introduced the new Housing Enabling Officer who had been working with the Senior Sheltered Housing and Lifeline Officer on this area of work. She continued that it might be necessary to consider converting anomalous sheltered accommodation to elderly persons accommodation.

It was also necessary urgently to review the lifeline service. Although the cuts to lifeline payments were not yet known SP had intimated that they would be large, in the region of 75%; in this case the service was provided to the wider community.

It was explained that there were a number of services that residents were not currently being charged for in their rent such as cleaning, communal lighting, laundry facilities. A list of these services and charges would be produced as soon as possible to ascertain the cost for providing them and whether they should be re-charged to the residents. The additional service charge would not affect those on housing benefit as these could legitimately be claimed through the benefit system. However they would affect anyone not on benefit and paying full rent.

The viability of charging for these services had to be weighed against the possibility that the cost might have the effect of discouraging new entrants who were not on benefits from taking up sheltered housing.

The Divisional Head of Housing and Environmental Services explained how prior to the introduction of SP the payment for these services was received through the rent and subsequently through housing benefits. However the payments received from SP had been eroded as this only covered the costs relating to the provision of support and not other services. With the introduction of formula rents these charges no longer formed part of the rent. It was therefore important to ensure that all legitimate service charges that could be paid from housing benefit were charged, otherwise the Housing Revenue Account would become increasingly depleted.

The Divisional Head of Housing and Environmental Services explained that the Tenant Forum had already discussed the issue of service charges and that two members of the Forum had volunteered to be on a working group to look at this issue. She invited comments from the Tenants' Forum representatives.

The tenants' representatives discussed how service charges might be raised as fairly as possible.

RESOLVED that the Group is happy that officers are covering all necessary aspects of the situation and that the programme of works be recommended for adoption to the Community and Housing Committee and the Council.

The meeting ended at 10.50 am.