

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 10.00am on 13 OCTOBER 2005

Present:- Councillor P A Wilcock – Chairman

Councillors:- C A Bayley, J F Cheetham, C M Dean, E J Godwin, R T Harris, B M Hughes, S C Jones, R M Lemon and J I Loughlin

Officers in attendance:- R Chamberlain, S Clarke, R Harborough, J Mitchell, P O'Dell, P Snow and T Turner

SDAG36 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Flack, M A Gayler and A J Ketteridge, and from A Bovaird.

SDAG37 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2005 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

SDAG38 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) SDAG35 – Environmental Indicators for Inclusion in a Strategic Vision for Uttlesford

Councillor Cheetham expressed her concern that the Advisory Group was in danger of becoming bogged down in statistical analysis and was not making sufficient progress in formulating a strategic vision.

The Executive Manager (Development Services) reminded Members that it had been agreed, at the meeting on 30 June 2005, that two of the then remaining scheduled meetings would be devoted to each of the three broad themes of economic, social and environmental factors. The chosen indicators would first be selected and then refined for inclusion in a final strategic document and all of the themes would be brought together for agreement at the last scheduled meeting in April 2006.

The Chairman agreed that there was a danger of the Advisory Group drifting but felt that the original agreed timetable was being met and to illustrate this asked that it be added to this minute, as follows:

SDAG Work Programme

- Seven meetings scheduled at broadly six week intervals
- Propose to continue work around the three broad themes: economic, social and environmental well being

- Two issues in relation to each indicator:
 - a) where are we now
 - b) where do we want to be by 2016
- Two meetings per theme is broadly the time we have available

SDAG39

SOCIAL INDICATORS FOR INCLUSION IN A STRATEGIC VISION FOR UTTLESFORD

The Executive Manager (Strategy and Performance) introduced a report presenting a selection of indicators appropriate to social well-being which could be adopted for the measurement of progress. The indicators represented current best practice from the Audit Commission, ODPM and other national bodies. A series of indicators were put forward for consideration under the following general headings:

- Quality Housing
- Crime
- Inclusion
- Active Citizens
- Thriving Villages
- Leisure Activities
- Lifelong Learning
- Health

Following a general discussion about the best way of defining social well-being, Members considered each of these headings in turn. Under the heading of **Quality Housing**, Members gave particular consideration to the themes of homelessness and the provision of affordable housing. On the subject of homelessness, the Executive Manager (Housing Services) said that a major challenge facing the Council was to evolve a policy to achieve a proper mix of housing provision to deal with the needs of homeless people in the district. Present trends indicated a decline in housing needs by family units and an increase in need for younger single vulnerable people. The challenge was to deal with the problem of homelessness by using available vacancies to help those people most in need on the housing register. To achieve this the Council would need to seek to use more imaginative solutions.

Members agreed with this analysis and considered that it was essential to continue to monitor homeless activity in the district and to seek to devise a range of policies designed to eradicate the problem of homelessness in the district. A suitable indicator should be developed to help the Council devise policies to bring about that objective.

Detailed consideration was given to the availability in the district of sufficient quantities of affordable housing. The view was expressed that the mix of housing provision in the district had not been right for a number of years and a more flexible approach was needed in co-operation with RSLs and private developers. This approach could then be incorporated into the local plan. One of the barriers to the ability to satisfy local demand was that much affordable housing provision was not actually affordable for many younger

people living and working in the district. One solution might be to provide for the construction of more live/work units.

There was general agreement that need was often hard to determine as there was perceived to be a hidden problem of young people living in the parental home who were unable to obtain their own accommodation. Reference was made to the shared ownership scheme but it was considered that many younger people were unable to afford shared ownership properties. In conclusion, it was agreed that the quality and type of housing provision should be developed into a further indicator.

Under the heading of **Crime**, a number of Members commented that many of the statistics referred to in the report were collected by the Police. In general terms, the Working Group were satisfied with the figures already collected. However, it was felt that it might be beneficial to carry out some original research into the levels of apprehension of crime among the district's population.

In relation to **Inclusion**, the Advisory Group considered how the provisions of the recent Disability Discrimination Act would impact on the Council's responsibilities in relation to access to public buildings. The Executive Manager (Development Services) agreed there would be a need to devise suitable measurement standards to help achieve compliance with the Act. It was suggested that the measurement of the standards would need to take account of the provision of leisure facilities for disabled people.

This prompted a lengthy discussion about the social welfare of migrant workers, many of whom were now believed to be working in the district, both at Stansted Airport and in other locations. The employment of migrant workers in the low wage economy was perceived as a growing problem in East Anglia generally and, by its nature, would be difficult to quantify. It was known that many Eastern European nationals were transported into the area to work and others were living in hostel type accommodation in the southern part of the district.

The Executive Manager (Housing Services) confirmed there was virtually no contact between his office and the migrant worker community and therefore no hard evidence was to hand about the scale of the problem. Councillor Dean said that she had met with the Managing Director at Stansted Airport to discuss the potential exploitation of low wage earners and it was apparent there was a knowledge gap on this subject because of the operation of the franchise system.

Members agreed that the employment of migrant workers was part of the hidden economy and it would be valuable to obtain further information on how many foreign workers were employed in the local economy. Accordingly, it was agreed to include an indicator relating to methods of engagement with migrant workers and dealing with their needs.

In this context, it was noted that an employment forum was due to be held at Stansted Airport on Friday 21 October and it was hoped that one or more Members would be able to attend to represent the Council.

Under the heading of **Active Citizens**, there was general agreement that the percentage level of turnout for local elections was an important measure but was only one strand indicating levels of participation and local engagement.

The suggested indicators to identify **Thriving Villages** referred to the provision of a range of facilities such as local shops, pubs and bus services. It was thought that communities that were thriving would be likely to have a village appraisal in place already and that the Council should seek to encourage all village communities to embark on a similar appraisal process.

On the subject of **Leisure Activities**, the Advisory Group thought that it would be helpful to measure statistics on the use of leisure centres in the district. The Chairman commented that two measures should be readily available, the first relating to the number of attendees at leisure centres in the district and the second relating to attendance levels at Saffron Walden Museum.

In considering the suggested indicator for **Lifelong Learning**, a question was asked as to why the statistics to indicate the number of enrolments for Uttlesford residents was so out of date. The Performance Improvement Manager responded that the figures had been obtained from the Adult Learning Centre website and those for the year 2002/03 were the most recent that were available.

Councillor Harris said that a number of adult learning courses in Essex had been closed down in the last two years, more specifically those for which no nationally given qualification was the end product. He felt that this trend amounted to a crime against the public as it had resulted in far fewer opportunities for the public to enrol in adult learning courses. Members generally agreed with his view that this Council should be more involved in encouraging the provision of recreational and educational activities within Uttlesford by helping to provide access to the necessary resources.

The Chairman thought that this would be a suitable subject for reference to the relevant Scrutiny Committee as a project that could be properly researched and monitored. In this context it was agreed that organisations such as U3A should be given greater encouragement.

The Advisory Group finally considered a suggested range of indicators relating to **Health** provision. It appeared that all of the indicators identified in the report were currently measured by the Uttlesford PCT and it was agreed that the Council should continue to work together with this organisation to promote health provision in the district.

Following discussion of each of the headings in the report, the Chairman instituted a brief discussion about the future direction of the Advisory Group.

The Executive Manager (Development Services) said that the Group had now undertaken the three base line exercises and that officers would shortly be in a position to bring the selected indicators together for presentation at the final scheduled meeting so that an overall strategic vision could be developed.

In considering its conclusions, Members might be confronted with some uncomfortable solutions to the problems identified. For example, the Advisory

Group might have to reconsider the Council's entire approach to future housing development in the district by being prepared to countenance a reduction in construction standards.

The Chairman agreed and drew attention to the potentially large discrepancy in the likely number of affordable dwellings coming forward for development in the future as compared with known levels of demand. This prompted a discussion about the nature of the market led approach to housing provision in the United Kingdom and the role that the provision of low cost housing would play under prevailing conditions. Councillor Godwin was anxious to explore the current legislative position relating to local authority powers over empty homes. The Executive Manager (Housing Services) said that environmental health officers were undertaking research on this matter and a report would be prepared for presentation to the relevant Committee in due course. Members agreed that it was important to continue to monitor the use of empty homes as this might provide one possible solution to the shortage of housing accommodation in the district.

This raised the question of how quickly the Council should seek to implement the strategies being devised. The Chairman commented that the Council's corporate strategy was in place for the period until 2007 and that the Council should seek to look at implementing a new strategic policy framework from that date onwards. A focused paper was needed for the next meeting of the Advisory Group to begin this process.

Action:- That the officers seek to develop further the indicators identified in the text of this minute for future consideration.

The meeting ended at 11.45am.