

Minutes of the meeting of the **Housing Best Value Sub-Committee** held on **1 April 2003** when there were present:-

Cllr K A Gibbs
Cllr J M Pullen
Cllr P K Savill
Cllr P F A Webster
Cllr Mrs M A Weir

OFFICERS PRESENT

G Woolhouse - Head of Housing, Health and Community Care
S Clarkson - Head of Revenue and Housing Management
S Neville - Residential Services Unit Manager
J Bostock - Principal Committee Administrator

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

Resolved

That Cllr P F A Webster be appointed Chairman of the Sub-Committee

2 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Sub-Committee noted its Terms of Reference.

3 HOMELESSNESS/HOUSING STRATEGY ACTION PLANS - PROGRESS REPORT

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing Health and Community Care which detailed progress on the implementation of the Housing Strategy and Homelessness Action Plans. A paper providing some background to the housing service, particularly the landlord function, was tabled by the Head of Revenue and Housing Management.

In address the report the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care referred to the valuable contribution which could be made by the Sub-Committee in overseeing strategies. He confirmed that the Housing Best Value inspectors would be commencing work at Rochford the following week.

Responding to Member questions on the covering report, Officers advised that:-

- The production of a homelessness strategy was a legal requirement.

- The strategy needed to look beyond the basic legal requirement on authorities to provide housing for defined groups/situations. A key thrust was the introduction of arrangements aimed at preventing homelessness occurring.
- An aide memoir on definitions of homelessness would be produced to assist Members of the Sub-Committee. Information would also be provided on the budget provision for the Homelessness/Housing Strategy Action Plans.

The Sub-Committee commenced a page by page review of the Housing Strategy Best Value Review Action Plan. Observations were made as follows:-

Strategic Working

- Proposals for the input of housing issues into the Rochford Community Strategy would be brought to the Sub-Committee.
- The new Corporate Plan/Best Value Plan, incorporating housing issues, would be available prior to the summer recess.
- Recent consultation with the Government Office for the East of England had established that the Government was prepared to be flexible in terms of the timeframe for producing the Housing Investment Programme (HIP) statement.

Housing and Support Needs

- The Council's Housing Needs Study was now four years old and planning was needed soon to update the information. The Sub-Committee could play a valuable role in defining the scope of the new study.
- A partner housing association had received grant monies from the Housing Corporation to assist with the development of a further learning disability scheme in Rochford.
- The Housing Corporation had provided grants in 2003/04 for several Supported Housing Schemes.

Mental Health

The Head of Housing, Health and Community Care confirmed that difficulties have been encountered in obtaining information from Social Services on the quantification of supported housing needs.

Members recognised the importance of this aspect and it was:-

Recommended to the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the County Council be advised of this Council's concern at the difficulties being experienced in obtaining information from Social Services on the quantification of supported housing needs. (HHHCC)

Domestic Violence

- The Housing Corporation had approved a 2003/04 grant of £310,000 for the funding of a scheme for "move on" accommodation for women/children suffering domestic violence. There would be no cost to the Council.
- Government domestic violence initiatives related to women and children. Whilst the Authority occasionally had approaches from men, there was no current provision for male sufferers. The Council's domestic violence co-ordinator may have some statistics relating to men. Officers would review the possibilities for inter-authority working on developing a facility for men suffering from domestic violence.

Young Mothers

- The Council inputted information to a teenage pregnancy strategy co-ordinated by the Primary Care Trust. The main involvement in this area was from other agencies, particularly education. The Health Authority led on publicity.
- The bid for Housing Corporation funding for 2003/04 for two 'move-on' flats had been successful (funding of £120,000 having been achieved).

Young People

- The length of time during which young people stay in 'move-on' accommodation depended very much on the individual and the capacity to acquire life skills. The Government had introduced a new requirement relating to the priority treatment of homeless 16/17 year olds and care leavers, which was likely to lead to an increasing demand for the housing of younger people approaching the Council.

- Applicants needed to be at least 18 years of age for a normal tenancy. It is possible for the Local Authority to hold a tenancy for 16-18 year olds as a Trustee. Giving wider publicity to the availability of the Housing Register to young people was an aspect of improved forward planning.
- Officers would arrange for a copy of the last Housing Needs Study to be circulated to Members of the Sub-Committee.

Elderly and Frail Elderly

- Housing Corporation funding had now been received for Hardwick House, Rayleigh.
- The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had recently issued guidance on the development of older persons strategies - a key aspect of which was 'joined up working' between the agencies. Officers would produce a paper identifying the current and proposed activities.
- Officers were pressing the consultants producing the Frail Elderly Needs survey to submit their final report. The report would be brought to the Sub-Committee during May.
- Officers were investigating the possibilities for expanding the Handy-Person service. In terms of funding, Social Services currently contributed £8,000 and the District Council and Primary Care Trust £4,000 each. There was also elements of voluntary contributions.
- Officers would produce an analysis of the levels of the Council's own housing stock/private sector stock and the number of persons in partial/full benefit.
- Officers had been in discussions with Springboard on the possibilities of developing a reliable service for maintaining the gardens of elderly residents at cost for persons who were not Local Authority tenants. It was understood that the Police had made available a budget of £10,000 for the funding of some gardening services for elderly residents to assist with crime prevention.

The Chairman referred to the possibility that the Authority could introduce some form of award for Council approved services such as gardening. This could be allied to inspection processes. An award charge could be made with the objective of achieving self-financing services. Tenants would feel safer dealing with Council approved service providers. Officers confirmed that they would give consideration to this aspect.

Physically Disabled

- An increase in publicity about the availability of property adaptation services could lead to increased applications. However, wider publicity would accord with the philosophy of equal access to all.
- Social Services determined whether adaptations were necessary for people with disabilities.

Rural Needs

- Officers would advise the Parish Councils of District Council concern at the low level of interest shown by the Parishes in proposals to meet twice a year to discuss housing strategy issues and local housing needs.

Private Sector Housing

- The housing market was such that the private sector had shown little interest in a Landlord forum. The majority of Landlords within the District only owned a small number of properties.
- Officers were in communication with the contractor undertaking the Council's housing stock condition survey with a view to obtaining the final report.
- It appeared that amendments to Council Tax legislation which would release funding for re-investment in housing services, particularly to deal with long term empty homes, could be in place by early 2004. It was too early to establish whether legislative change would have any financial consequences for the Council, although it ought to be cost neutral.

General Needs and supply

- New arrangements for the management of sheltered housing had been in place since 3 March. A press release would be issued at the appropriate time.
- Officers would report back on the take-up associated with the invitations to management organisations to be involved in joint working.

Homeless/Housing Advice

- Discussions had established that there was not sufficient capacity to progress the development of accommodation schemes outside the District.

- There were now 28 units available for temporary accommodation owned by the Council.
- The creation of an independent housing advice service separate from the service dealing with homelessness was seen as best practice, but would have potential costs. A joint service with another local authority was one option. A range of options would be set out within the Homelessness Strategy, with costs being reported to the Sub-Committee

Black and Ethnic Minorities

A Member referred to the possibility that, from the racial perspective, the monitoring of housing register applications to identify the needs of people within specific groups could be seen as unfair to the rest.

Responding to questions, Officers advised that:-

- Ethnic groups represented 0.6% of applicants.
- Monitoring had been put in place so that the Council complied with the Commission for Racial Equality Code of Guidance in Rented Accommodation.

Ex Offenders

- The work associated with the identification of the future needs of ex offenders for supported housing could often deal with emotive areas, particularly when ex-offenders had been involved with sexual or violent offences. Some persons with offending histories were deemed to be intentionally homeless. It was not the case that ex offenders were able to queue jump, but research showed that the provision of housing and support services reduced the likelihood of re-offending.
- The information to be supplied on the background work associated with development of the homelessness strategy should be sufficient to enable Members to understand the requirements associated with ex offenders.

People Leaving Hospital

- Notwithstanding that the planning permission aspect needed review, the main restriction on finalising the introduction of a unit providing accommodation for intermediate care and home care support staff in one of the Council's sheltered housing schemes was the cost of minor property adaptations (estimated to be in the sum of £9,000-£10,000). The accommodation would provide for one patient for a period of up to six weeks at a time. There

would be no charge to the patient, the Primary Care Trust and Social Services being responsible for payment of rent and the provision of care. The Sub-Committee endorsed the suggestion of Officers that they would review the possibilities for implementing the adaptations, via delegated authority if possible.

Meeting the Needs

- The Sub-Committee endorsed the view of Officers that it would be appropriate to undertake consultation on particular subject areas such as older persons' accommodation/homelessness rather than hold a wide ranging housing strategy forum this year.
- The supporting people framework had now come into effect. Whilst Officers had yet to receive programme details, it was likely that the County Council would undertake reviews of existing contracts during the early part of the financial year.
- The Housing Corporation had agreed a total funding of £2.8m for five schemes. It was likely that the bid involving St Mark's field and the Springboard Housing Association had been unsuccessful because it related to general rented affordable accommodation, which was not seen as a regional priority. It may be that alternative schemes would have to be considered for this site.

Having concluded a review of the Housing Strategy Best Value document, the Sub-Committee agreed that it would be appropriate to give detailed consideration to the Homelessness Best Value Review Action Plan and the Housing Management Best Value Action Plan at the next meeting. Officers would liaise with the Chairman to identify a suitable date.

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and closed at 12.52pm.

Chairman

Date