

Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee 13 March 2003

Minutes of the meeting of the **Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **13 March 2003** when there were present:

Cllr M G B Starke (Chairman)
Cllr T Livings (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr Mrs T J Capon
Cllr T G Cutmore
Cllr D F L Flack

Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn
Cllr C J Lumley
Cllr Mrs M A Starke

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr P A Capon.

SUBSTITUTES

Cllr P F A Webster.

VISITING

Cllr Mrs M J Webster

OFFICERS PRESENT

R Crofts	- Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
G Woolhouse	- Head of Housing, Health and Community Care
H Drye	- Corporate Policy Manager
C Thomas	- Emergency Planning and Health and Safety Manager
J Bourne	- Leisure and Contracts Manager
P McKenna	- Woodlands and Environmental Officer
A Coulson	- Housing, Client and Strategy Officer
C Evans	- Trainee Solicitor
J Bostock	- Principal Committee Administrator

ALSO PRESENT

County Councillor R A Pearson
N King and C Durdle - Consultants for the Housing Support Partnership
C Bentley – Operations Manager, Holmes Place

123A MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2003 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

124 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs M J Webster declared a personal interest in the item on NHS Scrutiny – Delayed Hospital Discharge by virtue of being the Deputy to the County Portfolio Holder for Community Care.

125 OLDER PERSONS HOUSING STUDY

The Committee welcomed Nigel King and Clive Durdle of the Housing Support Partnership who were in attendance to give a presentation on the findings of the Partnership's Phase 2 report on development of an Older Persons Accommodation and Support Strategy. The presentation addressed and expanded on the draft executive summary furnished with the Agenda, providing background to the eight main areas identified as appropriate for strategic review.

During the presentation Members noted that:-

- The Council's own sheltered accommodation is generally modern, in good condition and in reasonable locations, so the authority does not face the major problems that are apparent in some other areas.
- References to dissatisfaction with cleaning at sheltered housing related to the larger cleaning projects, such as deep cleaning carpets.
- There were some effective heating/energy systems in place, but provision was not consistent. Further thought needed to be given to cavity insulation and thermostatic valves.
- The Partnership was aware that the Authority had considered the issue of provision for electric buggies within sheltered housing. This was worth further review.
- Since October 2000 there has been a legal requirement that local authority accommodation should conform with the standard provided by the independent sector. The distinction between sectors was, therefore, likely to be less pronounced over future years.
- There were many examples of persons being capital rich but income poor. Shared ownership or equity release arrangements might assist.
- Statistically the District had a higher than average number of persons awaiting discharge from hospital. With the right support systems, sheltered housing could help address this.

- The Partnership would provide Members with the names of authorities where close working relationships between the public/private sector was a feature.
- The Safe Home Income Plan was an organisation which set standards for equity release schemes.

The Committee thanked the Partnership representatives for their comprehensive presentation and confirmed that the finalised report would be given detailed consideration by the Housing Best Value Sub-Committee, which would formulate recommendations.

126 NHS SCRUTINY - DELAYED HOSPITAL DISCHARGE

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care which outlined the recent health scrutiny joint study into delayed hospital discharges. Members welcomed County Councillor Roy Pearson who was in attendance as a member of the Joint Overview & Scrutiny Panel which undertook the study.

It was recognised that there were a number of linkages between the joint study and aspects of the Council's work in producing an Older Person's Accommodation and Support Strategy.

During debate it was noted that the Overview & Scrutiny Panel had given particular consideration to the contribution of social services and transport aspects. It was also noted that:-

- The County Council's budget for community care in the current year was £243 Million.
- Some London Boroughs purchased hospital beds in the south of the County and, because of their larger budgets, were able to pay higher fees which led to a shortage of accommodation for Essex placements. The County was hoping to establish fifty additional intermediate care beds within Essex.
- Problems could arise with adaptations to properties in terms of both the length of waiting and the associated costs.
- The County would continue to endeavour to achieve monies from all possible sources. It was not anticipated that there would be any additional funding from Government.

During debate it was observed that many of the problems highlighted by the study had been in existence over a number of years. A Member commented that the differing cultures between agencies responsible for providing services could lead to a lack of 'joined-up' thinking. An

aspect of the culture of organisations providing health and social care was a focus on budget needs rather than the needs of clients.

It was confirmed that a key aim of the study was to develop partnership working.

Members endorsed the study and the associated recommendations. The Head of Housing, Health and Community Care confirmed that he would bring the next scrutiny study on non-urgent patient transport to the Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

127 HOLMES PLACE PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received a report from Holmes Place Leisure Management on the progress and development of the Leisure Management Contract. Members welcomed Carl Bentley, Operations Manager for Holmes Place, who was in attendance to present the report.

During his presentation Mr Bentley wished to emphasise the value of the close working relationship between Holmes Place and the Council in developing leisure provision. He confirmed that each site within the contract had its own business plan.

Responding to Member questions, Officers advised that:-

- The new Car Parking Places Order for the Freight House, Rochford was to be in place during April.
- A report on the provision of facilities at the Park Sports Centre was to be submitted to the meeting of Full Council on 29 April 2003.

In referring to Mill Hall developments, Mr Bentley confirmed that Holmes Place would like the Council to give consideration to renaming the Hall 'The Mill (Arts and Events Centre)' and relocating its crest from the front of the building to the side. Holmes Place felt that relocation of the crest would help the objective of providing a clean lined modern look to the building. This, combined with renaming, was seen as a valuable rebranding approach that would move public perception away from the facility only being a public hall.

Mr Bentley confirmed that it had always been an objective of Holmes Place to ensure existing activities were maintained but that the customer base was enhanced. It was noted that proposals had been originally identified at the initial contract stage and that all costs would be met by the contractor. It was observed that the proposals could improve the Hall's commercial prospects.

On a motion, moved by Councillor Mrs H L A Glynn and seconded by Councillor P F A Webster, it was:-

RECOMMENDED to the Community Services Committee:-

- (1) That the Mill Hall be renamed 'The Mill (Arts and Events Centre)'.
- (2) That the Council's crest be relocated from the front of the Mill building to the side. (CD(F&ES)/Holmes Place)

128 BEST VALUE REVIEW – EMERGENCY PLANNING

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on the conclusions of the Best Value Review of Emergency Planning within the District.

It was noted that, from the financial perspective, the cost of endorsing all the actions emanating from the Review would represent an increase to the current budget of approximately £2,600. Constitutionally, any proposals associated with the formation of an Emergency Planning Sub-Committee would need to be agreed by Full Council. It was also noted that there was a possibility that the Government would issue a White Paper on Emergency Planning during the Spring of 2004.

Responding to Member questions, Officers advised that:-

- Any negotiations with Castle Point Borough Council as to partnership arrangements for joint use of its dedicated facility would include provision for reciprocal arrangements as appropriate.
- The development of proposals for an appropriate location for an Emergency Planning Response Centre would not necessarily result in increased costs.

During debate, the Committee concurred with the observation of the Chairman that addressing Emergency Planning was particularly timely in the context of world-wide concerns on potential terrorist and other incidents. A Member commented that, overall, the proposed actions struck an appropriate balance, with increased costs being relatively marginal.

With regard to proposals for an Emergency Planning Sub-Committee Members agreed a motion, moved by Councillor P F A Webster and seconded by Councillor T G Cutmore, that such a body should have executive powers.

With regard to proposed actions to address flooding, a Member referred to a difference between the observation in the report that the Council should maintain the current position of providing sandbags for the elderly and vulnerable and a recent press article indicating that the Council did not make such provision. Reference was also made to a Council leaflet on flood advice which appeared to contradict the position set out in the report.

In debating this aspect, a Member referred to the possibility that the Council's newspaper, Rochford District Matters, could be utilised to set out the correct position. Responding to Member questions, Officers indicated that the cost of re-issuing a leaflet was likely to be in the region of £700 to £800.

A motion that the leaflet be immediately re-issued to assist public understanding, moved by Councillor D F Flack and seconded by Councillor C R Lumley, was lost on a show of hands. A motion that consideration of re-issuing the leaflet be referred to the Community Services Committee, moved by Councillor P F A Webster and seconded by Councillor T G Cutmore, was agreed. A motion that the budget for flooding be increased from £2000 to up to £3000 to facilitate extension of the current sandbag arrangements, moved by Councillor D F Flack and seconded by Councillor Mrs H L A Glynn, was agreed.

RECOMMENDED to the Community Services Committee:-

- (1) That the actions set out at Appendix D of the Report of the Chief Executive (including the introduction of a budget provision of up to £3,000 to extend current sandbag arrangements) be agreed and that Full Council be asked to establish an Emergency Planning Sub-Committee as identified with appropriate executive powers.
- (2) That consideration be given to re-issuing the leaflet on Flood Advice. (CE)

Note: Councillor D F Flack wished it to be recorded that he had voted for immediate rectification and re-issue of the flood advice leaflet on the basis that it did not contain the correct interpretation of Council policy and that, should re-issue not be agreed by the Community Services Committee, he would consult the external auditors.

129 WOODLANDS STRATEGY

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) on the draft Woodlands Strategy produced for the management and development of the Council's Woodland areas.

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During debate it was noted that the strategy would address resource issues associated with current demands on the woodlands service and lead to service development. It was observed that the strategy was of particular importance in the context of the Council's role within the Thames Gateway project.

Responding to Member questions, the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) advised on the long term nature of the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park project. The establishment of an access road from the A1013 to the Park was part of the latter stages of the project and included negotiating access. This aspect had been included in the Local Plan. Officers would investigate improving signage to indicate that the public could access this location via a public footpath.

On a Motion, moved by Councillor P F A Webster and seconded by Councillor Mrs H L Glynn, it was:-

RECOMMENDED to the Community Services Committee:

- (1) That the Woodlands Management strategy and the associated action plan be adopted.
- (2) That Officers report back with the finalised Woodlands Grant Scheme documents.
- (3) That progress reports on the action plan be brought back to the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis. (CD(F&ES))

The Meeting closed at 10.05pm

Chairman

Date