

Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 19 March 2002

Minutes of the meeting of the **Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **19 March 2002** when there were present:

Cllr D F Flack – Chairman

Cllr Mrs J M Giles
Cllr J E Grey
Cllr Mrs J Helson

Cllr Mrs L Hungate
Cllr J R F Mason
Cllr G A Mockford
Cllr Mrs M J Webster

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Mrs J E Ford.

OFFICERS ATTENDING

P Warren	Chief Executive
G Woolhouse	Head of Housing Health and Community Care
S Clarkson	Head of Revenue and Housing Management
H Drye	Corporate Policy Manager
C A F Thomas	Emergency Planning & Health and Safety Manager
C Burton	Housing Manager
P Denholm	Solicitor
S Whitehead	Solicitor
A Coulson	Housing Client and Strategy Officer
A Wyatt	Committee Administrator

110 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs J M Giles declared a non pecuniary interest in item “Frail Elderly Housing Needs Survey” (Minute 112) by virtue of her mother living in Hardwick House.

111 OVERALL WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive, which detailed topics for consideration by this Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with a view to agreeing the priorities for the work programme and timetable.

Members noted and agreed the suggested work as follows:-

Items to be considered before Summer recess

- Frail Elderly Study
- Best Value Review – Emergency Planning
- Integration of Swayne Park and former Park School
- Extension of Star Partnership
- Feasibility of employing Tenant Liaison Officer

Items to be considered largely after the Summer Recess

- Best Value Review – Community Safety
- Best Value Review – Public Regulation, Inspection and Protection

Items to be brought twice yearly to September/October and February/March Committees

- Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy
- Leisure Contract

Items to be brought before June/July and November/December Committees

- Ground Maintenance Contract

Ongoing Items

- Housing Management Issues
- Matters arising from the agreed Action Plans covering the Best Value Reviews on Housing Strategy and Housing Management

Noting the work to be undertaken on the integration of Swayne Park and the former Park School site, Members were mindful of the £60,000 which had been set aside in the Capital Programme for drainage and footpath works at Swayne Park and agreed a motion moved by Councillor Mrs J Helson and seconded by Councillor Mrs J M Giles.

Resolved

- (1) That the Committee consider at its next meeting a detailed plan on the proposed footpath and drainage works at Swayne Park, as requested at the Community Services Committee on 5 February 2002. (CD(F&ES))
- (2) That the Work Programme outlined above be agreed. (CE)

112 FRAIL ELDERLY HOUSING NEEDS STUDY

The Committee received a presentation from Nigel King and Clive Durdle, consultants from the Housing and Support Partnership on the results of the Frail Elderly Housing Needs Study.

With the aid of view foils, Members were led through the current frail elderly housing needs and supply throughout the Rochford District, in particular focusing on the possible future development of the Hardwick House site and also the opportunity to provide alternative means of housing support to meet the needs of frail, older people.

It was noted that the result of the bid for Housing Corporation funding for a new older persons unit on land adjacent to Hardwick House, Rayleigh, was outstanding although the Consultants considered the scheme would probably fall short of Housing Corporation Scheme Development standards.

Noting that the County Council was nearing completion of its Best Value Review of older people's services, and that the "extra care" model may bring potential savings to Frail Elderly Services, Members considered that a copy of the Consultants' report should be made available to all Members of the Committee as well as the County Council, and the Primary Care Trust in order for dialogue to be opened on the potential to improve and tailor services to specific client needs. It was further considered that the report should be made available to as wide a range of partner agencies as possible.

Resolved

- (1) That a copy of the Consultants' report on the findings of the Frail Elderly Needs Survey be widely distributed and that dialogue be opened with Essex County Council and the Primary Care Trust, with a view to this Committee working on and producing a strategy for tailored, improved supported housing services specific to frail elderly needs prior to the summer recess.
- (2) That the Policy and Finance Committee be requested to consider the retention of the Housing and Support Partnership as consultants on this project with officers reporting into that Committee on the possible sources of funding for this. (HHHCC)

113 BEST VALUE – EMERGENCY PLANNING

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive, which opened up the Best Value Review of the Emergency Planning Service for challenge by Members.

With the aid of a powerpoint presentation, Members received a presentation from the Council's Emergency Planning and Health and Safety Manager.

Noting and agreeing the schedule attached to the report, Members considered the following areas needed more work or should be included in the Best Value Review.

- **Pets**

It was considered there was a need for adequate planning including the supply of alternative accommodation, food etc., with regard to pet animals during emergency situations. The Review should also consider evacuation and temporary accommodation of farm animals.

- **Children**

It was considered essential for the welfare of children to be taken into account when planning for alternative accommodation and/or entertainment.

- **Untested Assessments**

Mindful of the limitations of the review and that all scenarios for emergency planning could not all be "planned" for, Members were of the opinion that all steps should be taken to ensure evacuation, allocation of Rest Centres and a Transportation to Rest Centres procedures should be more positively assessed.

- **Psychological Effects – Bereavement**

It was considered essential for this work area to be considered in the Best Value Review.

- **Member Involvement**

It was considered that Members would play a vital role in communicating information to the public and press in times of emergency and that this point should be borne out in the Best Value Review.

- **Risk**

It was considered that an independent risk appraisal of the potential emergency situations that could arise would be an aid in the overall planning and decision making process.

Resolved

That the points outlined above be taken as the initial views of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee with regard to the Best Value Review for Emergency Planning. (CEX)

114 RENT ARREARS RECOVERY – WATER CHARGES

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on the continued collection of water and sewerage charges from all tenants other than those in sheltered accommodation. Noting the item would be subject to consultation with tenants and that it was now illegal for Water Companies to cut off water supplies, it was

Resolved to **RECOMMEND** to the Community Services Committee, a change of policy in as much as:-

- (i) that ceasing to collect water and sewerage charges on behalf of Water Authorities from April 2003 be supported in principle and that preliminary notice be given to the Essex and Suffolk Water Company.
- (ii) that Tenants' views are sought in accordance with the Council's statutory duty to consult on any proposed changes to their Tenancy Agreement.
- (iii) that a further report be submitted to a future meeting of the Community Services Committee after the consultation period.
(HRHM)

115 DECORATING ALLOWANCES

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management which sought to review the current practice of awarding a decorating allowance against void properties in a poor state of decoration.

Noting the current difficulties with the present Decoration Allowance Scheme, Members endorsed Officers' proposed way forward and it was

Resolved to **RECOMMEND** to the Community Services Committee:-

- (1) that the Decorating Allowance Scheme stop, with the proviso that the Housing Manager can award an exceptional decorating allowance of £40.00 per room (to a maximum of £200) if the property is refused twice or in other exceptional circumstances.

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- (2) That exceptional decorating allowances be paid half in advance and the remainder is claimed within 6 months of accepting the tenancy following an inspection and proof of expenditure.
Payments to be made directly into the rent account. (HRHM)

The meeting closed at 10.05 pm.

Chairman _____

Date _____