

## POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL 8 NOVEMBER 2010

*Present :-* Councillor Nigel Offen (Chairman)  
Councillors Nigel Chapman, Margaret Fisher,  
Mike Hardy, Michael Lilley and Lesley Scott-Boutell

*Substitute Member :-* Councillor Margaret Fairley-Crowe for Councillor Jill Tod

*Also in Attendance :-* Councillor Tim Young

### 13. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2010 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to the amendment of the sixth paragraph of Minute no. 11 to read 'Councillor Barton went on to express the view that complete pedestrianisation would not work in Colchester.'

### 14. Have Your Say!

Mr Andy Hamilton addressed the Panel, pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1), on the Shopmobility Scheme in Colchester. He was of the view that the Council had acted in a discriminatory manner in moving the scheme from the former bus station to St Mary's car park. He expressed concern for those people with disabilities who were dependent on public transport and so did not have easy access to the car park. He also felt that it was necessary to increase the days and hours of operation. Mr Hamilton referred to his previous offer to operate a mobility scooter service from the former bus station location which had been rejected by the Council on the grounds of the imminent development of the site, a situation which Mr Hamilton considered to be inaccurate.

Councillor Tim Young, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Safety refuted the allegations made by Mr Hamilton, confirming that these issues had been responded to at length previously by Councillor Tina Dopson. Councillor Young reported that the Shopmobility Scheme administered by Tendring District Council had been curtailed but this Council would continue to support the scheme in Colchester for as long as possible.

**Councillor Nigel Chapman and Councillor Nigel Offen (in respect of being a member of the Board of Colchester Borough Homes) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)**

**Councillor Tim Young (in respect of being a member of the NHS North East Essex Primary Care Trust ) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)**

**Councillor Michael Lilley (in respect of his role as a carer for his mother) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)**

**Councillor Tim Young (in respect of his spouses membership of Essex County Council) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)**

## **15. Review of Accommodation for Older People**

The Chairman explained that the Panel was taking the opportunity to conduct a debate around the opportunities and challenges regarding accommodation for older people and, with this in mind, a range of partners and interest groups, including Essex County Council, the Homes and Communities Agency and Care and Repair England as well as local housing associations, Colchester Borough Homes, Age UK, local accommodation providers and pensioners groups had been invited to the meeting to contribute to the discussions.

Councillor Tim Young, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Safety, attended the meeting and, with the consent of the Chairman, addressed the Panel. Councillor Young made reference to Charles Smith House and Walnut Tree House as examples of schemes which had been refurbished at a cost in the order of £1million each. The schemes were good ones but he doubted whether the facilities they provided, whilst acceptable for older people who had lived through the privations of the second world war, would be deemed acceptable to older people of later generations. He considered it was now vitally important to look afresh at the issues in the light of current opinion and he thanked the Panel for giving this matter a sufficient level of priority to allow for the meeting to be mainly dedicated to its consideration and for the gathering of opinions.

Finally Councillor Young confirmed to the meeting the four questions posed in the background report by the Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration for the Panel to consider, which were:

- Should the Council continue to provide sheltered housing for older people in the future? And if so,
- What sort of housing should we be providing either directly or with our partners or through other interventions such as the Planning system?
- What are the Panel's views on the Colchester standard?
- How can we best use our assets in a climate of reducing resources?

Tina Hinson, Strategic Housing Manager, presented to the Panel a background report explaining that the Council's Strategic Plan had identified as a requirement the completion of a strategic review of accommodation for older people. The first stage of this review involved the assessment of seven of the Council's sheltered housing schemes and would then broaden out to include all the Council's sheltered housing schemes. The review would ultimately seek to encompass a strategic look at total provision in Colchester Borough.

By way of background Ms Hinson provided a range of supporting information, including:

### **Demand, need and demographics**

- About 60% of older households have no dependent children but occupy homes with a greater number of bedrooms than they need;
- Around a quarter of family homes owned by Colchester Borough Council (CBC) are occupied by a single person;
- Some 68% of those over 65 owned their own homes in 2001, a figure set to rise to 75% by 2026;
- Nationally, life expectancy has risen by five years since 1997. Life expectancy at age 65 is 17.4 years for men and 20.0 years for women;
- In Colchester, some 15% of the Borough's population is over 65 and more than 25% of households are headed by someone over 65. The numbers of people over 65 are likely to grow faster than any other household type over the next 30 years;
- Across the country, 1.3 million people of pensionable age are working. This group has increased 50% since 2000. Conversely, older people spend 70-90% of their time in their homes, much more than any other age group;
- At the end of August 2010 there were 539 people on the Councils housing register who were suitable for sheltered housing, whether or not they had expressed a preference for this type of housing;
- The largest number of applicants (some 40%) were registered in Band E, that is, assessed as being housed in homes that meet their needs and with little or no chance of being re-housed;
- The oldest applicant was 99 years old and the youngest was 46 years old. The oldest application had been active since 1970.

### **Types of provision and current supply**

A spectrum of housing options was available to older people. The options fell broadly into three groups:

- Mainstream or housing which is not designated for a specific group, including 'general needs' housing with no special features, 'lifetime homes' designed to meet access and adaptability standards for everyone including older people and 'adapted homes' changed to meet the needs of its occupier;
- Specialised housing for older people, usually designated for the over 55s, including 'sheltered housing' (independent living, 24-hour alarm system, some sort of warden service, communal facilities, programme of social/wellbeing activities), 'very sheltered/assisted living' (independent living with managed care and support services, may include meals, domestic help, access to assisted bathing), 'extra care' (independent living with managed on-site care and support services, may also include, 24-hour on site staff, communal dining room, hobbies room, hair-dressing, can also be provided for a specific need such as dementia), 'close care housing' (independent living with on-site care and support linked to a care home), 'retirement villages' (large developments with a range of housing types and levels of care and support on one site);
- Residential care, with suites of bedrooms with care and facilities including

'residential or care homes' (accommodation with meals, personal care provided with staff on-site), 'care homes', 'care home with nursing' and 'specialised care homes' (specific needs including for those with dementia).

It was intended that the wider strategic review would look in more detail at what these different types of housing actually provided, what their client groups were, how applicants accessed the accommodation and the services and support provided. It was accepted that much of the current provision was built at a time when life expectancy was lower, expectations were lower and older peoples' care and support needs were not as great.

The Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation (HAPPI) had been established in June 2009 to undertake a major good practice exercise, gathering examples from across Europe. There were some real challenges in meeting the housing needs of older people in the current economic climate. However innovative solutions included:

- The potential to integrate/co-locate older persons housing with other services such as GP and other health-care services;
- Re-designating sheltered housing as retirement housing which would appeal to the older active population but would not have the care and support services on site;
- Co-locating older persons housing with extra-care housing to enable older people to benefit from the services offered at the extra-care scheme;
- Meeting the needs of older owner-occupiers who were capital rich but cash poor.
- Meeting the needs of older people whose primary housing need isn't their age but their drug/alcohol problem;
- Adapting general needs housing in a time of decreasing resources.

### **Colchester's Review – overview of findings so far**

The Review was designed to make sure that Sheltered Housing delivered an efficient and effective service and was a valuable asset which included:

- High quality support tailored to residents need;
- Meeting the requirements of the Decent Homes Standard and the Disability Discrimination Act;
- Reduced unplanned maintenance costs for the service as a whole;
- Reducing the potential for sheltered housing tenants to experience fuel poverty by reducing the costs of heating homes;
- Reduced void levels and increased demand;
- Delivering a supported housing service which is a resource to meet the housing support needs of older people in the Borough;
- Ensuring the service was able to meet the requirements of revenue funders such as Supporting People and Adult Social Care.

The review also considered strategic issues including strategic fit, future proofing, meeting need and sustainable homes and communities.

To aid the review a Colchester Standard for Sheltered Housing had been drafted which

set out certain minimum criteria against which future provision could be judged:

- Communal rooms;
- Kitchen, to include sink, units running water;
- Laundry to include commercial white goods;
- Self-contained flats;
- Separate Kitchens;
- Separate bathing facilities to meet the standard for life time homes;
- Separate bedroom;
- Facilities to support mobility scooters;
- Lift – no upper floors without the provision of a lift;
- Separate stairwell to the above;
- Guest Room (further customer insight to be used to establish demand etc.);
- Disability Discrimination Act compliant;
- Heating – cost per unit;
- Door Entry Systems;
- Community Alarm;
- Local Facilities that meet the requirements of the Homes and Communities Agency Standards;
- Setting individual Standard Assessment Procedure energy ratings for dwellings

The Chairman invited Pat Strachan, Housing Action Support Officer from Care and Repair England to make a presentation to the Panel.

Pat explained that Care and Repair England was a small national charity with no local services which aimed to improve living conditions for older and disabled people by campaigning, influencing and informing. She provided some additional facts about older people and housing, both nationally and locally, including the local 61% rise in people with dementia compared to a rise of 44% nationally. She also set out the conclusions from the Older Persons Workshop in terms of the need to plan ahead to enable people to consider their future needs, the opportunities presented by lifetime neighbourhoods and better designed homes and the need for information and advice to all whether they are tenants or owner occupiers. She was clear that there needed to be a wider debate on all the issues including new ideas such as helping people to stay at home with the use of adaptations, telecare, improved services and social activities.

The Chairman invited Susannah Westwood, Senior Planning and Commissioning Officer in Essex County Council's Adults Health and Community Well-Being to make a presentation to the Panel.

Susannah gave a detailed presentation including the following issues:

- Essex County Council's role;
- Social Care Policy Direction;
- Reforms to the Social Care System;
- Key Priorities;
- Personal Budgets;
- Housing Choices;
- Extra Care Housing – Need, Advantages, Challenges and Roles.

The Chairman invited Aaron Elliott to give an update to the Panel of the work of the Homes and Communities Agency, explaining that, over the last three years there had been £81.6m investment in supported housing, including two schemes in Colchester. Communities and Local Government was the sponsor Government Department for the Agency which had previously allocated £8.6bn nationally although this figure had been reduced to £6.8bn and would decline further to £4.4bn over the next four years. However, awaiting the outcome of the new government's Comprehensive Spending Review, the Agency was now working in a new context – less funding, but greater flexibility to deliver on local authority priorities. With less capital expenditure available, the Agency was interested to see what new affordable models of housing would emerge. He offered to circulate some examples of best practice from across the country.

The Chairman opened the discussion to the members of the audience and the following contributions were made:

Michael Siggs, from the Almshouse Movement questioned the mainstream services currently provided for older people in the context of the improvements made to houses for their residents by the Almshouses and the future provision of care for older people in their homes;

Karen Loweman, from Colchester Borough Homes (CBH), explained to the Panel that CBH manages 24 different housing schemes for older people providing a range of solutions for people's various priorities and needs. The hope was that this would help people to avoid having to move as their needs changed. CBH did have a reasonably successful incentive scheme which provide support and assistance to people to help them move to suitable accommodation;

Dave Miller, from Hanover Bloc, made reference to the findings of The Elderflowers Model, a New Type of Housing for Active Older People:

- 3.3 m homes are under-occupied by the 50-69 age group representing 16% of the whole housing stock in England, and 50% of all under-occupied homes;
- In 1981 the proportion of households under-occupying was 25% compared to the current 37%.

He was of the view that although down-sizing ought to be attractive in terms of releasing funds, high levels of under-occupancy were due to a lack of choice in terms of alternative housing. He believed there was a will to help people to move out of larger homes but the lack of suitable alternatives created a block preventing any changes to place;

Councillor Frame, in his capacity as Chairman of Colne Housing Society, stressed the need for the Panel to look into the whole housing for older persons issue and, in particular, to consider the work being undertaken by and the options available from other providers;

Clare Lawrance from Colne Housing Society referred to the fact that 27,000 social rented homes were under-occupied by one bedroom. Older people were being

incentivised by offers of cash but this strategy was not working and she was of the view that it would be more successful to provide practical support to assist people to move;

Pat Strachan was of the view that the current mainstream approaches to older people's accommodation were not sustainable. A range of options were needed which would provide support for people in their homes because that was where they wanted to stay. She felt that Colchester had good provision and there was good work being undertaken but greater efforts need to be done to raise awareness and to bring together all the information about alternatives and initiatives.

The Panel discussed the issues raised in the presentations and by the members of the audience and gave particular consideration to the following issues:-

- The need to find a realistic solution to the issue of home owners with restricted incomes and the benefits of releasing funds through down-sizing in order to generate income to move to better designed properties with adequate heating and other facilities;
- The need for practical support schemes to be made more readily available and their existence to be more widely known;
- The dilemma of encouraging people who are under occupying to move when there are few alternative options specifically for older people;
- Questions regarding the management and provision of housing stock for older people by the Council, especially given that much of it is sub-standard, and the possibility of selling units in order to generate income to improve others;
- The possibility of reinstating the original designation of two bedroom properties in rural areas which had been allocated for older people but which now formed part of the general needs stock;
- The new government's drive towards localism and the anticipated changes to the Planning system which were intended to provide the ability for communities to decide what type of housing they preferred in their areas.

The Chairman thanked the audience and the Panel members for their very valuable contributions and sought guidance from the Portfolio Holder regarding the next stages for the Council in terms of formulating its Strategic Policy on Accommodation for Older People.

Councillor T Young also thanked the Panel and the audience for their attendance and welcomed the suggestions and ideas that had been generated by the debate. He invited the Panel to consider setting up a Task and Finish Group to look into the issues on his behalf and to move the debate towards a broader strategy.

*RESOLVED* that the suggestion from the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Safety to set up a Task and Finish Group to look into the issues relating to Accommodation for Older People be agreed and arrangements be made by the Democratic Services Manager for nominations from the political groups to be invited and a draft scoping document, including terms of reference for the Group, to be formulated for approval by the Chairman in advance of the Group's first meeting.

## **16. Single Equality Scheme // Action Plan Annual Update**

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Corporate Management asking the Panel to review the Single Equality Action Plan which had been updated to show progress up to October 2010.

Details of the progress made against each of the ten objectives in the action plan was set out in the appendix to the report. Good Progress or work was progressing well in respect of six of the objectives and policies had been put in place to address a further two of the objectives.

Further work would be necessary in respect of the objectives relating to the assessment of how employee and customer data could be more effectively utilised to improve service delivery and the identification of any gaps in this data. The Equality Act 2010 included proposals to place a duty on public authorities to publish a range of equality data relating to their workforce and it would therefore be necessary to comply with these proposals, should they come into force, by April 2011.

It was felt that the requirements set out in the public sector equality duty should form the council's priorities for 2011.

The Panel discussed the issues raised in the report and gave particular consideration to the following issues:-

- The extent to which the equality and diversity issues were becoming embedded in the organisation;
- The impact the processes were having in terms of changes to policies as a consequence;
- The mechanisms used to ensure that contractors undertaking work on behalf of the Council were, in turn, complying with the equality standards;
- The training opportunities to ensure councillors, contractors and staff were fully aware of their equality and diversity responsibilities.

*RESOLVED* that the progress made to date in respect of the Single Equality Scheme Action Plan and the areas of priority for 2011 be noted.

## **17. Work Programme 2010/11**

The Panel considered a report from the Head of Corporate Management setting out the current situation regarding the Panel's work programme for 2010/11.

The Chairman of the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Panel has confirmed his wish for the Olympics 2012 item to be included in the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Panel's work programme but that all members of the Policy Review and Development Panel would be welcome to attend the meeting when the matter was considered. The item had therefore been removed from the Policy Review and Development Panel's work programme.



The timetabling for consideration of the Allotments Strategy had not been possible to meet and this item would need to be rescheduled along with the item on Cycle Paths and Cycle Town Initiative.

*RESOLVED* that the current situation regarding work programme for 2010/11 be noted.