

**SOCIAL ISSUES SCRUTINY PANEL****18 October 2005**Attendance:

## Councillors:

Hammerton (Chairman) (P)

Chapman  
Coates  
Hutton (P)  
Love (P)  
MaynardNunn (P)  
Quar  
Rees (P)  
Saunders  
Steel (P)TACT Representatives

Mr Gilbert-Wood

Deputy Members:Councillor Berry (Standing Deputy for Councillor Saunders)  
Councillor Jackson (Standing Deputy for Councillor Maynard)Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:Councillor Collin (Portfolio Holder for Healthy and Inclusive Communities)  
Councillor Hiscock (Portfolio Holder for Housing)Others in attendance who did not address the meeting:

Councillor Davies

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillors Chapman and, Saunders and Mr Rickman (TACT).

2. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions asked or statements made.

3. **WINCHESTER HOUSING FORUM**

(Oral Report)

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Margaret Newbigin, Chair of the Winchester Housing Forum.

Mrs Newbigin detailed to the Panel the aims of the Forum, its membership and achievements to date and answered a number of questions.

4. **BACKGROUND TO HOUSING SERVICES**  
(Report SO07 refers)

Mr Gilbert-Wood (TACT) reminded the Panel of the perception that the calculation of Winchester's contribution to the National Housing Subsidy system was unfair. In response, Councillor Hiscock (Portfolio Holder for Housing) and the Director of Communities supported the comments and reported that the Audit Commission had recently requested that the formulae be simplified.

Further to discussion of issues related to Affordable Housing (including Rural Exception sites and Affordable Housing ratios etc) the Director reported that additional funding had been sought from partner organisations to increase the hours of the Rural Housing Enabler Officer. With regards to Rural Exception sites, the Council had achieved its current target.

The Director also reminded Members that the provision of Affordable Housing was a Council Key Priority. Therefore issues regarding this required continued robust and cross-portfolio activity.

A Member noted with concern the withdrawal of the Council's 'Homecheck' Service following the absence of partnership funding. Following discussion, the Director of Communities stated that he would investigate why the funding had been withdrawn, but added that the service was discretionary and that without partner funding, concentration on core activities should remain a priority.

The Panel asked to be kept updated on progress against the key issues regarding Housing Services (as highlighted on pages 4 and 5 of the Report) and the Director of Communities indicated that these would be highlighted in future Business Plans.

RESOLVED:

That the contribution made by the Council's housing services towards the aim of providing homes, as set out in the Corporate Strategy, be noted.

5. **SECOND QUARTER PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2005/06 – HOUSING PORTFOLIO (HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT)**  
(Report SO9 refers)

The Panel discussed a statement from Mr Gilbert-Wood (TACT) that the Council must continue to have regard to the quality of life of existing tenants of sheltered schemes, as part of the trial of the placement of homeless clients in previously 'hard to let' units. Members noted the success of the trial in terms of the overall reduction of long-term voids and dependence on Bed and Breakfast for emergency accommodation. They were also appreciative of the assurances given by the Director of Communities that Housing Managers continue to work closely with all tenants involved and that those few incidents to date had been swiftly resolved.

A Member referred to a recent consultancy report commissioned by the Council to investigate processes within the Housing Landlord Services division, notably regarding homelessness allocations and void maintenance. The Director clarified that this report was being considered by the Housing Information Systems Informal Scrutiny Group and that therefore the report was to be considered, along with officer and Member response, at a future meeting of the Panel.

The Panel referred to the performance of existing policies on the management of void properties. Members were pleased to note various initiatives and incentives were being promoted by officers to improve the indicators. It was requested that officers investigate the possibility of revisions in policies regarding void management, e.g. whether maintenance of voids could be carried out when tenants were in situ (as was the case with some Housing Associations) as so not to delay overall re-let times. They also noted the difficulties in the collection of former tenant arrears and its impact on other performance indicators.

Members requested that in future, the percentage figures as set out in Appendix 4 for Local Performance Indicators be presented in real terms, as this would be more illustrative in context.

RESOLVED:

That subject to clarification of the matters raised above, the Scrutiny Panel is satisfied that work is progressing as required so that targets agreed by Council and Cabinet, required to deliver the Council's strategic priorities, can be achieved by the deadlines set.

6. **SECOND QUARTER PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2005/06 – HOUSING PORTFOLIO ( HOUSING GENERAL FUND)**  
(Report SO10 refers)

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Panel is satisfied that work is progressing as required so that targets agreed by Council and Cabinet, required to deliver the Council's strategic priorities, can be achieved by the deadlines set.

7. **SECOND QUARTER PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2005/06 – HEALTHY AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO (GENERAL REPORT)**  
(Report SO11 refers)

The Panel discussed the implementation of the Alcohol Exclusion Zone in the City Centre and acknowledged the occasional displacement of alcohol related anti social behaviour. However, rather than revising the zones accordingly, it was noted that appropriate support mechanisms were being put in place to assist clients.

The Panel referred to the need to actively promote 'exercise prescriptions' and the 'low-level circuit project' in partnership with local Primary Care Trusts.

The Director of Communities circulated to Members the first quarterly progress report of the Winchester Community Safety Partnership, as produced for the Government Office for the South-East, as part of the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund bid. It was agreed that future reports be also copied to the Panel for its information.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Panel is satisfied that work is progressing as required so that targets agreed by Council and Cabinet, required to deliver the Council's strategic priorities, can be achieved by the deadlines set.

8. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME – REQUEST FOR ITEMS**  
(Report SO12 refers)

RESOLVED:

That the requests for inclusion of items in the Panel's programme of work as set out be endorsed.

9. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**  
(Report PS195 refers)

RESOLVED:

1. That the following appointments to the Former Tenants Arrears Informal Scrutiny Groups be agreed:

Councillors Hammerton (lead Councillor), Love,  
Rees and Mr Gilbert-Wood (TACT).

2. That final reports of the in-depth studies on the Community Safety Strategy and Housing Information Systems be considered at the meeting of the Panel scheduled on 30 January 2006.

3. That the Work Programme for the Panel as set out (subject the additional items as set out in Report SO12 and at 2, above) be agreed.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 8.40 pm

Chairman