

SOCIAL ISSUES SCRUTINY PANEL**11 November 2010**Attendance:

Councillors:

Love (Chairman) (P)

Achwal (P)

Coates

Clear (P)

Cooper (P)

Gemmell (P)

Hammerton (P)

Hicks (P)

Prowse (P)

Weston (P)

Witt (P)

Deputy Members

Councillor Berry (Standing Deputy for Councillor Coates)

TACT Representatives:

Mr Rickman and Mrs White

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Thompson (Portfolio Holder for Communities)

Others in attendance who did not address the meeting:

Councillors Izard and Tait

1. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Councillor Thompson declared a personal and prejudicial interest, due to her involvement as a Cabinet Member in actions taken or proposed in the Reports outlined below.

However, the Panel requested that she remain in the meeting, in her capacity as Portfolio Holder, under the provisions of Section 21(13) (a) of the Local Government Act 2000, in order that she could provide additional information to the Panel and/or answer questions.

Councillor Cooper declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest as Chairman of the Winchester District Community Safety Partnership. He remained in the room and spoke and voted thereon, specifically on those Reports below that referred to community safety matters.

Councillor Hammerton declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest as Vice Chairman of Bishops Waltham Citizens Advice Bureau. She remained in the room and spoke and voted thereon, specifically during discussion of

Reports SO22 and CAB2078, which referred to the revenue grant funding of voluntary organisations, which included the Bishops Waltham Citizens Advice.

2. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held 15 July 2010 be approved and adopted.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions asked or statements made.

4. **DRAFT CHANGE PLANS**

(Report [SO122](#) and [appendix](#) Refers)

The Assistant Director (Active Communities) introduced the Report during which she explained the proposals to reform the Council's Revenue Grants system. These changes were in response to a likely 25% reduction in grant funding over the next three years and to reflect the Council's new model of commissioning services to help achieve the priority outcomes of the Community Strategy.

Mr Rickman (TACT) reminded the Panel that the voluntary sector was already under pressure from the downturn in the economic climate through a reduction in charitable donations.

With regard to revenue support grants, the Panel were concerned that, rather than reflecting the Council's proposed new way of working in commissioning services, the proposals only reflected the organisation's current budget situation. Members noted with concern that without grant support to charitable groups to meet their core costs, the provision of services to clients by volunteers may no longer be possible in some cases.

Responding, Councillor Thompson acknowledged that the Council's predicted budget deficit would require some difficult decisions, particularly with regard to its support to the voluntary sector. However, she advised that the new commissioning approach could assist in achieving greater value for money for residents by removing any duplication in the provision of services within voluntary sector that supported the Council's priorities.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Active Communities Change Plan be noted.

2. **That Cabinet have regard to the concerns of the Panel regarding the proposed commissioning approach to the Council's Revenue Support Grant system and the negative impact that it could have in the voluntary sector and on services to communities.**

5. **COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO HOLDER – QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2010/11 – LANDLORD SERVICES**

(Report [SO120](#) refers)

During discussion, the Head of Landlord Services clarified that officers had delegated powers to proceed with implementing the schemes agreed as part of the Estate Improvement Programme. These were generally projects that would be of direct benefit to tenants.

Mr Rickman (TACT) reported that tenants were particularly concerned about the loss of housing revenue to the HRA arising from the delays to the project to redevelop Whitewings House, Denmead. TACT looked forward to seeing revised proposals coming forward in the new year.

Councillor Thompson explained that the reclassification of some of the Council's sheltered housing schemes to general needs accommodation was required to redress an existing imbalance between the numbers of void properties and housing need. For example, there were a disproportionate number of void one-bedroom flats in sheltered schemes and a considerable demand for one-bedroom general needs accommodation.

During discussion of the Appendix 2 to the Report (Landlord Services Business Plan Update), the Head of Landlord Services agreed to provide further information, in future reports, on the status progress of desired outcomes.

RESOLVED:

That the performance information in the report be noted.

6. **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY OUTCOME: ACTIVE COMMUNITIES QUARTER 2 2010/11 PERFORMANCE MONITORING UPDATE**

(Report [SO121](#) refers)

The Assistant Director (Active Communities) updated the Panel that, with regard to CUL/007/J (Youth Music), a new temporary music worker had been appointed to drive this project forward. The Panel was also advised that although all the associated Sports and Physical Activity milestones were on track, the Government had recently announced that it had cancelled funding of the School Sports Partnerships, which had been very active in the District.

During discussion, Councillor Thompson clarified that some 'Play Builder' funding was available from the County Council for schemes ready to be implemented without delay. It was hoped that this could be utilised to facilitate a scheme in Stanmore, Winchester.

RESOLVED:

That the performance information in the report be noted.

7. **'COMPREHENSIVE SPENDING REVIEW. ALIGNING THE SERVICES TO ENSURE WE ARE FIT FOR PURPOSE MOVING FORWARD'**
(Report [SO119](#) Refers)

The Panel generally welcomed the approach outlined in the Report, subject to clarification of its legality. It was noted that the Council could potentially become more involved in an "at-arms-length" management role of private sector rented housing.

During discussion, the Head of Strategic Housing confirmed that any such proposals would be part of a consolidation of existing practices and therefore would be carried out within existing staff resources. It was also confirmed that officers continued to work proactively to redress any increases in temporary homeless that may occur following the reform of the housing benefit system. Bed and Breakfast accommodation would be utilised only as a very last resort.

RESOLVED:

The Report is noted

8. **CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2010/11 TO 2013/14 – BUDGET OPTIONS**
(Report [CAB2074](#) refers)

The Head of Finance drew attention to an error in the Active Communities section of the Capital Programme Budget Options, as set out at page 3 Appendix B to the Report. This should have included 'River Park Leisure Centre', which was currently included under 'Prosperous Economy' listed below.

During discussion, the Head of Finance responded to comments of the Panel with regard to allocation of capital grants for community groups.

RESOLVED:

That the initial Capital Budget Options be noted.

9. **GENERAL FUND BUDGET CONSULTATION 2011/12**
(Report [CAB2078](#) refers)

The above Report was not notified for inclusion on the agenda within the statutory deadline. The Chairman agreed to accept the item onto the agenda, as a matter requiring urgent consideration, due to the need of Principal Scrutiny Committee and the four Scrutiny Panels to consider the matter in November, as part of Cabinet's consultations on the proposals as outlined in the Report.

The Head of Finance drew specific attention to the Active Communities section of the General Fund Budget Options, as set out at page 1 Appendix B to the Report. During discussion, Councillor Thompson clarified that the options proposed for Neighbourhood Wardens were designed to enhance their existing functions. It was not intended that there would be a reduction to their role in communities.

The Panel raised concerns about the possibility (under option 1) to delete the posts of Acceptable Behaviour Coordinator and Community Safety Data Analyst, as these posts were grant funded only up to March 2011. It was agreed that both roles made a significant impact to the work of Winchester District Community Safety Partnership. The Panel therefore requested that if the retention of the posts could not be achieved via budget growth items, negotiations should take place between the City Council and the County Council, via the Winchester District Community Safety Partnership, as to how the roles of the posts could continue to be delivered.

Councillor Thompson acknowledged that both posts were valued by the Winchester District Community Safety Partnership in helping to target resources in communities where most needed.

RESOLVED:

1. That Cabinet have regard to the concerns of the Panel of the possibility (under Budget Option 1 – Community Safety) to delete the posts of Acceptable Behaviour Coordinator and Community Safety Data Analyst, and note that, if the retention of the posts could not be achieved via budget growth items, negotiations should take place between the City Council and the County Council, via the Winchester District Community Safety Partnership, as to how the roles of the posts could continue to be delivered.

2. That the remainder of the General Fund Budget Options related to the Active Communities outcome section of Appendix B to the Report, be noted.

10. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME (REPORT [PS431](#) REFERS) AND MATTERS ARISING.**

The Panel noted that the Landlord Services Benchmarking Data Informal Scrutiny Group was to hold its inaugural meeting next Thursday, 18 November. The Chairman supported a request from the Head of Landlord Services for there to be additional representatives from TACT on the Group.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Work Programme, as set out on the reverse of the agenda, and as extracted from Report PS431, be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 8.05pm

Chairman