

SOCIAL ISSUES SCRUTINY PANEL

21 July 2005

Attendance:

Councillors:

Hammerton (Chairman) (P)

Chapman (P)
Coates (P)
Hutton
Love (P)
Maynard (P)

Nunn (P)
Quar (P)
Rees
Saunders (P)
Steel (P)

TACT Representatives

Mr Gilbert-Wood and Mr Rickman

Deputy Members:

Councillor Pines (Standing Deputy for Councillor Rees)

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

203. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillors Hutton and Rees.

204. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR THE 2005/06 MUNICIPAL YEAR**

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Love be appointed Vice-Chairman for the 2005/06 Municipal Year.

205. **APPOINTMENT OF TACT CO-OPTES**

RESOLVED:

That Mr C Gilbert-Wood and Mr A Rickman (Deputies Ms H Dewdney and Ms J Steventon-Baker) be appointed as TACT co-optees on the Panel for the 2005/06 Municipal Year.

206. **TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

RESOLVED:

That future meetings of the Panel commence at 6.30pm and that the timetable of scheduled meetings for 2005/06 Municipal Year be noted.

207. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions asked or statements made.

208. **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT – FIRST QUARTER PERFORMANCE APRIL – JUNE 2005**

(Report SO3 refers)

The Director of Communities reported that, due to an administrative error, the above report also appeared as Report SO7 elsewhere on the agenda (albeit with a slightly different title). In view of this duplication, it was agreed that discussion take place on Report SO3 and that report SO7 be withdrawn from the agenda.

Further to questions, Councillor Hiscock (Portfolio Holder for Housing) reported that the merging of the Central Control service with the Council's CCTV operation required wider discussion on the technological requirements and siting. In the meantime, reciprocal emergency cover arrangements had been established for the central control service with Salisbury District Council.

Responding to the concerns of a Member, the Director of Communities reported on 'violence to staff' guidance and that it was a priority for this to be drawn up into a formalised protocol.

With regard to the apparent delays on the development of available land for affordable homes Councillor Hiscock explained that this was largely due to the current planning process and land ownership issues. He also reported that 16 units of key worker housing had been completed during the first quarter and he also updated the Panel on initiatives for empty warden flat allocations

Following a request, it was agreed that future performance monitoring reports indicate the total number of 'unfit dwellings' within the district so as to assist Members in their monitoring of progress against percentage targets.

Arising from discussion, the Director advised that he would report to a future meeting of the Panel on the reasons for an apparent increase of the average re-let times for general needs housing stock.

The Panel discussed with Councillor Collin (Portfolio Holder for Healthy and Inclusive Communities) the possible extension of the Neighbourhood Warden Service to other areas of Winchester. Councillor Collin reported that it would be beneficial to assess the success of the current warden deployment and the opportunities for contributory funding before making any decision to expand the service.

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.

209. **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT – OUTTURN 2004/05**
(Report SO1 refers)

The Panel supported a statement from Mr Gilbert-Wood that TACT considered that the calculation of Winchester's contribution to the National Housing Subsidy system was iniquitous and that Government be lobbied accordingly.

Responding to questions, the Director of Communities acknowledged that the variances specifically related to Dwelling Rents and Sheltered Charges required urgent addressing by officers.

The Panel agreed that continued proactive and flexible initiatives were required to ensure that the variances relating to void garages continued to decrease.

The Director stated that he would provide further information regarding capital cost contributions for private sewage treatment works (as requested by a Member of the former Housing Performance Improvement Committee).

RESOLVED:

1. That the outturn figures for 2004/05 for the Housing Revenue Account be noted.

2. That Cabinet be requested to lobby Government over the perceived iniquities in Winchester City Council's contribution to the National Housing Subsidy system.

210. **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT – PERFORMANCE OUTTURN 2004/05**
(Report SO2 refers)

Following a question from Mr Rickman, the Director of Communities detailed the existing working policies to achieve the maintenance of former tenant arrears to below £100,000 per annum. It was confirmed that temporary legal staff had been employed to progress recovery.

The Panel asked that this matter be kept under review and a Member suggested that this could be a suitable topic for the Panel to carry out an in-depth review.

RESOLVED:

That the performance outturn figures for 2004/05 for the Housing Revenue Account be noted.

211. **HOUSNG GENERAL FUND – SUMMARY OF ACTUAL EXPENDITURE 2004/05**
(Report SO4 refers)

RESOLVED:

That the outturn figures for 2004/05 for the Housing General Fund be noted.

212. **HOUSNG GENERAL FUND – PERFORMANCE OUTTURN 2004/05**
(Report SO5 refers)

Following comments from a Member, it was agreed that Cabinet be reminded of the recommendations of the recent Scrutiny Review of Affordable Housing to increase expenditure on the work of the Rural Housing Enabler within the district.

It was also requested that information regarding portfolio partnership working be provided to a future meeting of the Panel.

RESOLVED:

1. That Cabinet be reminded of the recommendations of the recent Scrutiny Review of Affordable Housing to increase expenditure on the work of the Rural Housing Enabler within the district.

2. That subject to the matters raised above, the performance outturn figures for 2004/05 for the Housing General Fund be noted.

213. **FIRST QUARTER PERFORMANCE MONITORING – GENERAL REPORT – HEALTHY AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO**
(Report SO8 refers)

Following discussion, it was agreed that in order to assist with Ward 'walkabouts' (as part of the promotion of the Green Agenda corporate priority), a more formalised approach be taken in future. This should include liaison with relevant District and County Councillors, as well as TACT and other appropriate officers, including those of the County Council. There should also be coordination with local community groups.

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.

214. **COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENTAL REPORT APRIL 2004 – MARCH 2005**
(Report LE01 Refers)

The Chief Executive advised that in future, performance information relevant to the Local Economy and Social Issues Scrutiny Panels will be produced in separate reports.

RESOLVED:

That the performance information as contained in the report be noted.

215. **COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT SUMMARY OF ACTUAL EXPENDITURE 2004/05**

(Report LE02 Refers)

The Chief Executive advised that in future, performance information relevant to the Local Economy and Social Issues Scrutiny Panels would be produced in separate reports.

The Panel noted with concern the 5 percent budget variance overspend for the department.

RESOLVED:

That the outturn figures for 2004/05 for Community Services be noted and that the Panel draw to Cabinet's attention their concern about the 5 percent budget variance overspend for the Department.

216. **WORK PROGRAMME AND APPOINTMENTS TO INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUPS**

(Report EN2 refers)

The Panel referred to their proposal arising from discussion of Report SO2, elsewhere on the agenda, regarding a possible in-depth review of policies related to former tenant arrears. It was agreed that subject to the approval of Principal Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet, an Informal Scrutiny Group to carry out this investigation be appointed at the next meeting of the Panel.

RESOLVED:

1 That subject to the approval of Principal Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet, the following appointments to Informal Scrutiny Groups be agreed:

(i) Community Safety Informal Scrutiny Group:

Councillors Hammerton (lead Councillor), Love, Nunn, Rees and Saunders.

(ii) Housing Information Systems Informal Scrutiny Group:

Councillors Hammerton (lead Councillor), Coates, Pines and Steel and Mr Gilbert-Wood (TACT)

2. That subject to the approval of Principal Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet, an Informal Scrutiny Group be appointed at the next meeting of the Panel to carry out an in-depth review of policies related to former tenant arrears.

3 That the Work Programme for the Panel as set out (subject the amendments to Informal Scrutiny Groups) be agreed.

The meeting commenced at 6.40 pm and concluded at 8.40 pm.

Chairman