

SOCIAL ISSUES SCRUTINY PANEL

28 November 2005

Attendance:

Councillors:

Hammerton (Chairman) (P)

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

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

TACT Representatives

Mr Rickman

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillors Collin (Portfolio Holder for Healthy and Inclusive Communities)
Councillor Hiscock (Portfolio Holder for Housing)
Councillor Davies

Others in attendance who did not address the meeting:

Councillors Berry, Jackson and Tait

525. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Mr Gilbert-Wood (TACT).

526. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meetings of the Panel held on 21 July and on 18 October 2005 be approved and adopted.

527. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions asked or statements made.

528. **WINCHESTER HOUSING FORUM**

(Oral Report)

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr Bell (Shenton's Solicitors), Chairman of the Winchester Community Legal Services Partnership.

Mr Bell detailed to the Panel the aims of the Partnership, its membership and achievements to date and answered a number of questions. At the conclusion of his presentation he requested that a City Councillor be affiliated to the partnership to help raise its profile.

Following discussion, Councillor Hiscock reported that he supported this proposal and would inform his Cabinet colleagues accordingly.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the presentation be noted.

529. **PROPOSED CORPORATE STRATEGY AND BUDGETS 2006/07**
(Report SO15 refers)

The Chairman declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest as she was a Non-Executive Member of the Mid-Hampshire Primary Care Trust. She spoke and voted thereon.

Councillor Saunders declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest as she was involved in the delivery of Meals on Wheels. She spoke and voted thereon.

The Chairman reminded the Panel that this report was intended to be considered in conjunction with Report CAB1149 – Roll Forward of Corporate Strategy and Revenue Budget 2006/07, which set out Cabinet's eight proposed savings relevant to the overview of this Panel. Members noted that the corresponding existing base budgets for 2006/07 were set out as an appendix to Report SO15.

Responding to questions regarding proposals to cease support to the Homecheck scheme, it was explained that it was unclear at this stage as to whether partnership funding would be reinstated. Councillor Hiscock suggested that despite this, there may be alternative schemes to re-target officer resources so as to maximise services to local residents.

Referring to the proposal to withdraw the non statutory subsidy of £21,000 to Hampshire County Council for Meals on Wheels, the Panel was unclear as to the impact this could have on vulnerable residents. Members therefore agreed that they were unable to pass comment to Cabinet regarding this proposal until they had been provided further information regarding the scheme, its funding in context and also any direct impact that the withdrawal of the subsidy may have on clients.

The Panel referred to the proposals regarding the Health for All budget underspend. The Director of Communities confirmed that the budget was not always spent, as was the case in the current financial year. Councillor Collin reported that Cabinet considered that it was sustainable to permanently reduce the budget accordingly.

At the conclusion of debate, Members considered that the majority of the savings identified were generally acceptable. However, the Panel agreed that they were unable to make an informed comment to Cabinet upon the proposals, until they had been provided further information on the relative impact on the delivery of the corresponding services as well as their existing operation and funding. Members were particularly concerned with items 4 (Homecheck), 5 (Health for All Budget underspend), 7 (Meal on Wheels) and 8 (Discretionary NNDR payments) pages 6-7 of appendix 2 of Report CAB1149 refers). Furthermore, it was agreed that in order to

ensure that an opportunity was given to consider these matters as part of the debate of the budget for 2006/07, this information be provided to the meeting of Principal Scrutiny Committee on 16 January 2006. Members of that Committee would be requested to comment on the proposals on behalf of the Panel.

RESOLVED:

1. That Cabinet note the comments of the Panel as set out in detail above.

2. That further information on the scale and potential impact upon residents from the following proposed budgetary changes be provided to assist Members in their debate and onward recommendation to Cabinet - this information to be provided for the meeting of Principal Scrutiny Committee scheduled on 16 January 2006:

- a) Homecheck
- b) Health for All Budget underspend
- c) Meals on Wheels
- d) Cease discretionary NNDR payments

530. **UPDATE ON THE HOUSING BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN**
(Report SO13 refers)

The Director of Communities responded to a number of questions regarding the Summary Improvement Plan as appended to the Report. It was noted that there was some general updating of information required, such as implementation dates. It was confirmed that priorities as identified in the Action Plan had been generally addressed and other actions taken forward to Business Plans.

Responding to questions regarding the management of Void Properties and relative impact upon the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), Councillor Hiscock reminded the Panel of the on-going work of an Informal Member Officer Working Group that was exploring various factors regarding this issue. It was agreed that the Panel would be informed of this Group's conclusions in due course.

Mr Rickman (TACT) reported that TACT were also concerned about the ongoing difficulties of Void management however appreciated some of the contributory factors such as hard-to-let properties.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

531. **HOUSING RENTS AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET 2006/07**
(Report SO14 refers)

Councillor Hiscock explained that he would prefer not to off-set any of the Housing Revenue Account reserves against the likely budget deficit. There was no existing policy for the maintenance of the reserves to a specific level.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the report, specifically the proposals to address a potential deficit in the Housing Revenue Account 2006/07 and options for rent increases, be noted.

532. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme for the Panel as set out on the reverse of the Agenda for the meeting be agreed.

The meeting commenced at 7pm and concluded at 9pm

Chairman