

**SOCIAL ISSUES SCRUTINY PANEL****9 March 2009****Attendance:**

Councillors:

Tait (Chairman) (P)

Achwal (P)

Berry (P)

Biggs (P)

Clear (P)

Fall

Gemmell (P)

Hammerton (P)

Hicks (P)

Love (P)

Ruffell (P)

Weston (P)

**Deputy Members**

Councillor Higgins (Standing Deputy for Councillor Fall)

**TACT Representatives:**

Mr Rickman

**Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:**

Councillor Coates (Portfolio Holder for Housing)

Councillor Cooper (Portfolio Holder for Communities and Safety)

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**1. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

Councillors Coates and Cooper declared personal and prejudicial interests due to their involvement as Cabinet Members in actions taken or proposed in the Reports outlined below.

However, the Panel asked the Cabinet Members, as Portfolio Holders, to remain in the meeting, under the provisions of Sections 21(13)(a) of the Local Government Act 2000, in order that they could provide additional information to the Panel and/or answer questions.

Councillor Tait declared a personal (but not prejudicial interest) in respect of Item 5 below - Landlord Services Division Business Plans 2009/10 onwards (Report SO84 refers) as he was a trustee of the Winchester Mediation Service, which was referred to within that Report. He remained in the meeting during consideration of the matter and spoke and voted thereon.

2. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held 12 February 2009 be approved and adopted.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions asked or statements made.

4. **WINCHESTER COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT**

(Report [SO80](#) refers)

Members noted that this item had been deferred from the previous Panel meeting.

Councillor Cooper advised that the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) jointly produced the Strategic Assessment and was a 'driver' for its priorities and allocation of resources over the subsequent year. Specific action points arising from the priorities identified would be delivered by each partner.

A presentation on the background to the Strategic Assessment was given to the Panel. In summary, Members were shown progress against the CSP's priorities with regard to various related trends over the previous three years. The CSP provided quarterly updates to partners on progress against its priorities. This information was also available to Parish Councils if requested.

During discussion, Councillor Cooper reminded Members of proactive and preventative work of the partnership to address, for example, substance misuse. The Partnership also regularly engaged with communities via Safer Neighbourhood Panels and Parish Councils. He also advised that the CSP's priorities were statistically driven and were therefore reliant on instances of criminal activity that had been reported. However, resources could be re-targeted to address emerging priorities throughout the year if necessary.

The Panel referred to the Alcohol Exclusion Zone (AEZ) in the Winchester town area and its contribution in alleviating alcohol related anti-social behaviour. With regard to the use of outreach workers, Members were advised that the CSP worked closely with the Trinity Centre. Individuals with drug or alcohol related dependency issues were signposted towards appropriate support packages. In addition, it was understood that the NHS was developing programmes of proactive treatment and the CSP would readily engage with any ensuing partnership work.

The Panel also discussed whether AEZs may be appropriate elsewhere in the District. With regard to Whiteley, the Head of Environment advised that the police believed that alcohol related anti-social behaviour at this location had been particularly associated with local youths. Therefore, the deployment of alternative resources would more appropriately deal with the matter.

The Panel referred to the Strategic Assessment's priority area to influence a reduction in road traffic collisions. It was explained that partnership working would continue to assist in the facilitating of appropriate signage, and policing, in areas where speeding was an identified concern, notably in rural areas.

It was noted that it remained a priority of the CSP to support projects designed to reduce domestic violence and that they would continue to work with organisations providing safe houses.

At the conclusion of discussion, in addition to the Panel requesting that it be provided with additional quarterly performance information on instances of fly tipping (and also information on how the CSP tackled this issue), Members requested details of the CSP's commitment to enable the provision of services to support those suffering from alcohol dependency. This was particularly associated with the Winchester town area AEZ. The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Safety was also asked to provide further information (or preferably a presentation to a future meeting of the Panel from the responsible partners) on how the CSP could best contribute to its priority to reduce road traffic collisions, especially from speeding.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Panel be provided with quarterly performance information on instances of fly tipping in the District and also clarification as to how the Community Safety Partnership tackled this issue.
2. That the Community Safety Partnership provide the Panel with quarterly performance information on its work to deal with the impact of alcohol and that the Partnership endeavour to enable the provision of services to support those suffering from alcohol dependency.
3. That the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Safety provide additional information (or preferably a presentation to a future meeting of the Panel, from the responsible partners) on how the Community Safety Partnership could best contribute to its priority to reduce road traffic collisions, especially from speeding.

5. **LANDLORD SERVICES DIVISION BUSINESS PLAN 2009/10 ONWARDS**  
(Report [SO84](#) refers)

The Head of Landlord Services updated the Panel that since publication of the Report, the Housing Minister had halved the national average rent calculation from 6.2% to 3.1%. Whilst this was good news for tenants, due to the late announcement, it was likely to cause some administrative difficulties for officers. He confirmed that the changes to rent payments were likely to continue to be offset against the Council's subsidy payment, although further guidance on this is expected later in the month.

Mr Rickman (TACT) updated the Panel on the work of the Council Housing Group in lobbying Parliament for fair rents and for reform to the negative subsidy system. He reported on the recent sudden and untimely death of one of the Group's chief campaigners, Alan Walter. On behalf of the Panel, the Chairman offered Mr Rickman and TACT his condolences.

During discussion of the appendices to the Report, the Head of Landlord Services reported that due to increased competition from other local authorities, Winchester had only just slipped from its top quartile performance position on rent arrears. However, the Council remained close to maintaining tenant arrears at or just below 1% of the total rent roll and it was a priority within the Business Plan to achieve top quartile again.

The Head of Landlord Services responded to questions on Appendix 4 to the Report - Key Elements of Risk Management. He was satisfied that OP0009 would be achieved and that the Decent Home Standard would be maintained. With regard to the servicing of gas fired appliances in Council homes (OP0010), he reported that due to the potential impact on the Council in relation to liability from faulty appliances, officers had ensured that tenancy agreements stipulated a need for access to carry out maintenance. Appropriate injunction processes were also in place where access could not be easily gained. It was also confirmed that OP0012 would be achieved, as robust procurement of contracts had ensured that the Council would not be left without a major service contractor.

At the conclusion of discussion, the Panel acknowledged the difficulties from the existing negative subsidy system and of the impact that this might have on maintaining the Decent Home Standard over time. Members also commented that the Landlord Services Division continued to manage the Council's housing stock very well and that tenants were provided with an excellent service.

The Panel did not identify any particular issues to be included in future performance monitoring reports.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Panel raises no comment on the Business Plan extracts, attached as Appendices to Report SO84.

6. **ENVIRONMENT DIVISION BUSINESS PLAN 2009/10 ONWARDS**  
(Report [SO86](#) refers)

The Head of Environment reminded the Panel that many of the service priority targets would be delivered by the Community Safety Partnership (CSP). Performance against these targets would also be monitored by the CSP's quarterly updates.

The Panel referred to its earlier discussion of the Winchester Community Safety Community Safety Strategic Assessment (Report SO80 refers,

elsewhere on the agenda) and agreed that the matters raised were also pertinent to this Report.

In conclusion, the Panel therefore agreed that it be provided with additional quarterly performance information on instances of fly tipping in the District and also information on how the CSP tackled this issue. Members also referred to a request for further information on the CSP's commitment to enable the provision of services to support to those suffering from alcohol dependency, and also on how the Partnership could best contribute to its priority to reduce road traffic collisions, especially from speeding.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Panel raises no comment on the Business Plan extract, attached to Report SO86 as Appendix 2,
2. That the Panel be provided with quarterly performance information on instances of fly tipping in the District and also clarification as to how the Community Safety Partnership tackled this issue.
3. That the Community Safety Partnership provide the Panel with quarterly performance information on its work to deal with the impact of alcohol and that the Partnership endeavour to enable the provision of services to support those suffering from alcohol dependency.
4. That the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Safety provide additional information (or preferably a presentation to a future meeting of the Panel, from the responsible partners) on how the Community Safety Partnership could best contribute to its priority to reduce road traffic collisions, especially from speeding.

7. **STRATEGIC HOUSING DIVISION BUSINESS PLAN 2009/10 ONWARDS**  
(Report [SO87](#) refers)

The Head of Strategic Housing drew to the Panel's attention that following creation of the new Performance, Communication and Improvement Division, key service priorities related to Community Planning were now included in the Strategic Housing Business Plan.

Responding to discussion, Councillor Coates advised that he shared some of the frustrations that the Council was unable to deliver more than 100 affordable units per annum. However, the figure had been set at a level that could be realistically achieved and was more than had previously been delivered. He referred to a recent market assessment that was to underpin future Local Development Framework policies. This had specified a minimum requirement of 460 units per annum. Councillor Coates agreed that there was a need to modify procedures and policies, wherever possible, to allow for continued and improved enablement and delivery, especially during the recession. He referred to the work of the Affordable Housing Informal Scrutiny

Group and advised that he also has some ideas to improve the current situation, including improving processes to drive forward rural exception sites. He reminded the Panel that, currently, the majority of affordable units came forward as a result of private development.

The Head of Strategic Housing advised that the 100 dwellings per annum was an estimated figure, that had regard to the phased development of schemes that officers were aware of. He confirmed that officers would continue to negotiate for the maximum potential affordable units on site, but had to have regard to the overall viability of the scheme. He also advised that, as lenders were requiring high deposits for first time buyers, there was now a preference for new schemes to be for social rented tenure, rather than for shared equity schemes.

At conclusion of discussion, the Panel was in agreement that the Council should strive to be as imaginative as possible in its enablement policies, if it was to increase the supply of affordable housing for its residents and meet demand. This was particularly important during the economic recession.

**RESOLVED:**

That, in the final drafting of the Strategic Housing Division Business Plan 2009/10 onwards, the Portfolio Holder for Housing have regard to the concerns of the Panel that the Council should strive to be as imaginative as possible in its enablement policies, if it was to increase the supply of affordable housing for its residents and meet demand.

8. **PRE-SCRUTINY DISCUSSION PAPER – CHOICE BASED LETTINGS – TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS**  
(Report [SO85](#) refers)

The Head of Strategic Housing reminded the Panel that, until the new system became 'live', officers were unable to obtain an accurate quantitative assessment of those waiting list applicants likely to be disadvantaged from the introduction of Choice Based Lettings. However, the detail within the Report could be accepted to provide an early indication to Members. During questions, it was suggested that it was likely that those clients who had been on the waiting list for a long time, but had a low housing need assessment, were likely to be disadvantaged by the new scheme.

Although accepting that the total amount of applicants to be disadvantaged was likely to be low, the Panel was in agreement that there should be some form of transitional arrangement in place. Members requested that the Head of Strategic Housing and the Portfolio Holder for Housing adopt an appropriate scheme to that affect.

RESOLVED:

That the Portfolio Holder for Housing, in consultation with the Head of Strategic Housing, adopt an appropriate transitional arrangement to ensure that the potential for applicants to be disadvantaged from the introduction of Choice Based Lettings is minimised.

9. **PARTNERSHIPS, COMMUNICATION AND IMPROVEMENT DIVISION  
BUSINESS PLAN 2009/10 ONWARDS**

(Report [SO88](#) refers)

The Panel noted that this item had not been 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 requirement for the Panel's comments to be taken account during the preparation of the Division's Business Plan.

Councillor Cooper reported that it had not been possible within the draft Business Plan to fully allocate staff resources against some priorities, until the restructure of the new Division had been completed.

The Panel referred to Appendix 2 to the Report and the Head of Partnerships, Communication and Improvement and Councillor Cooper responded to questions. With regard to key priority PCI11 (page 11), she explained that the survey was a response to a recent national survey by UNICEF that had indicated that the UK had scored low with regard to the 'perceived well being of young people'. The new District survey would assist the Council in prioritising appropriate actions, if necessary.

The Panel discussed engaging with younger people and it was agreed that decision making processes should be much quicker, if this was to be successful, particularly where a particular local youth need had been previously identified.

With regard to the new national key performance indicators as set out within the appendix (page 16), the Head of Partnerships, Communication and Improvement explained that there was a prescribed method for their collection, mostly in partnership with other organisations. She advised that she would investigate the rationale of the Primary Care Trust in setting the 'Under 18 conception rate' target (NI112, page 17) and report this information to Members outside of the meeting.

The Panel did not identify any particular issues to be included in future performance monitoring reports.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel raises no comment on the Business Plan extract, attached to Report SO88 as Appendix 2.

10. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND MATTERS ARISING**  
(Report [PS354](#) refers)

It was noted that the next meeting of the Youth Facilities Informal Scrutiny Group was to be held at 2.30pm on Friday 27 March 2009.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Work Programme, as set out on the reverse of the agenda, and as extracted from Report PS354, be noted.

11. **VOTE OF THANKS**

The Chairman thanked Members and Officers for their hard work and support during the Municipal Year. The Committee reciprocated appropriately.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 9.25pm

Chairman