

SOCIAL ISSUES SCRUTINY PANEL

17 July 2006

Attendance:

Councillors:

Hammerton (Chairman) (P)

Chapman (P)
de Peyer (P)
Higgins (P)
Howell (P)
Izard (P)
Love (P)

Quar
Nunn (P)
Stephens (P)
Tait (P)
Weston (P)

TACT Representatives:

Mr Rickman

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Coates (Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities),
Councillor Pearson (Portfolio Environment, Health and Safety)
Councillor Hiscock

Others in attendance who did not address the meeting:

Councillor Learney

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillors Quar and Councillor Worrall (Deputy Member).

2. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Love be appointed Vice-Chairman for the 2006/07 Municipal Year.

3. **APPOINTMENT OF TACT CO-OPTEEES**

Mr Rickman reported that TACT were considering a replacement for Ms Dewdney as she was unable to attend evening meetings.

RESOLVED:

That Mr A Rickman and Ms H Dewdney (Deputy Mr J Bond) be appointed as TACT co-optees on the Panel for the 2006/07 Municipal Year.

4. **TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

RESOLVED:

That future meetings of the Panel commence at 6.30pm for the 2006/07 Municipal Year and that the timetable of scheduled meetings for the 2006/07 Municipal Year be noted.

5. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held 16 March 2006 be approved and adopted.

6. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Councillor Hiscock sought clarification of pledges made by the current administration prior to their election, specifically regarding homes for first time buyers. He also suggested that related performance be monitored by appropriate local performance indicators. Councillor Hiscock requested clarification of the following:

- (i) What was the definition of 'homes built for first time buyers'? Does this refer to their completion, or planning permissions granted?
- (ii) Was there a base figure and year to relate performance to?
- (ii) Was there to be relevant target setting for the current year and three subsequent years?

The Chairman thanked Councillor Hiscock for his comments and it was agreed that that the Portfolio Holder for Housing discuss the points raised with officers and report back to Councillor Hiscock in due course.

7. **APPOINTMENTS TO INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUPS AND OTHERS**

(Report SO23 Refers)

RESOLVED:

1. That the Community Safety Informal Scrutiny Group be not reappointed.

2. That the following appointments to Informal Scrutiny Groups be agreed:

- (i) Housing Information Systems Informal Scrutiny Group:

Councillors Hammerton (lead Councillor), Chapman, de Peyer, Howell and Izzard and Mr Rickman (TACT).

- (ii) Former Tenant Arrears Informal Scrutiny Group:

Councillors Hammerton (lead Councillor), de Peyer, Love, Tait and Weston and Mr Rickman (TACT)

3. That Councillor Weston be appointed as the Council's representative on the Portsmouth City Council Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel (subject to receiving necessary information regarding the work of the Panel).

8. **HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S REPORT – PERFORMANCE OUTTURN 2005/06 - HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) SERVICES**

(Report SO24 refers)

Further to questions, the Director of Communities reported that the number of properties currently under-occupied (such as a single person in a three bedroom house) remained significant. Existing tenancy agreements did not compel tenants to 'downsize'. He reported that a previous incentive scheme to encourage such a move had not been as successful as had been hoped.

The Director confirmed that programmes of work to achieve obligations of the Decent Home Standard by 2010 were resourced by Government subsidy and not supplemented by the Council. Furthermore, agreed strategies would remain in place despite recently reported relaxation by Government of the requirements.

Referring to discussion of the management of void properties and relative impact upon the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), Councillor Coates reminded the Panel of the on-going work of the Supported Housing Informal Member Officer Working Group. The Group would recommend to Cabinet changes to policies to assist in the more effective management of the Council's properties. He also reminded Members of the reduction in the overall number of void properties, including those previously recognised as hard-to-let.

The Director reported on a number of initiatives to further reduce the number of long-term void properties. These included the possibility of the remodelling of, or the re-designation of, unpopular sheltered housing schemes.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the performance of newly appointed void maintenance contractors be reported to the Panel in January 2007 (in addition to Principal Scrutiny Committee).

Referring to the performance information as set out in the appendices to the Report, Members discussed the relevance of certain mandatory Best Value Performance Indicators. It was noted that their context was apparent only when linked to relevant Local Performance Indicators. It was also agreed that, where possible, future performance monitoring percentages should be shown against actual figures to assist with demonstrating their overall context.

A Member requested that the Council continue to investigate, via the amending of tenancy agreements, the possibility of allowing void contractors to carry out necessary works whilst outgoing and new tenants were in residence. It was recognised that this could potentially provide savings in void rent.

RESOLVED:

That the progress of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Services and financial out turn for the 2005/06 financial year be noted, but remains concerned about the management of void properties.

9. **HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S REPORT – FIRST QUARTER PERFORMANCE - HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) SERVICES**
(Report SO25 refers)

Responding to questions, the Director of Communities reported that Key Worker Housing was not specifically dealt with within the Council's General Needs Housing Stock, nor scheme of allocation. There were currently Government schemes, including loans, to assist those qualifying.

Responding to a query from a Member, the Director advised that ten days was allowed between the formal offer to a tenant of an available property and its re-offer following subsequent refusal. It was recognised that this delay was undesirable and the Director reported that this was one of several procedures under review regarding the more effective management of the housing stock.

The Director acknowledged that the introduction of a District wide Choice Based Lettings policy could inadvertently produce more hard-to-let properties. However, it would also offer valuable early indications of future un-lettable properties, allowing the Council to adjust policies accordingly.

Regarding matters related to the management of void properties and relative impact upon the Housing Revenue Account, Members noted proposed changes to procedures to continue to alleviate the problem and recommended that Cabinet support any proposals as a matter of urgency.

RESOLVED:

1. That the progress of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Services First Quarter Performance 2006/07 be noted.
2. **That Cabinet be recommended to give consideration to amending tenancy conditions to assist with the more effective letting of Council properties.**

10. **HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S REPORT – PERFORMANCE OUTTURN 2005/06 - HOUSING GENERAL FUND AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**
(Report SO26 refers)

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr Steve Lincoln (Community Development Manager). Mr Lincoln provided a presentation to the Panel on challenges facing the work of his team and highlighted a number of issues related to capacity. In summary, he explained that the Community Development Team was responsible for Community Safety, Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) policy, co-ordination of the Council's work on all matters related to anti-social behaviour, management of the Neighbourhood Wardens service, Community Development (including the drafting and implementation of a Community Development Strategy for the West of Waterlooville MDA), Social Inclusion, Community Planning, improving access to services with a particular focus on the Parish Access Project, Grants and Funding, and the developing agenda around Children and Young People.

The Chairman thanked Mr Lincoln for his presentation.

During discussion of the Report, a Member was concerned that a site identified as a suitable transit site for Gypsies and Travellers had yet to be acquired, pending further analysis of the proposals by Hampshire County Council (the landowner). The Director of Communities clarified that the City Council's responsibilities was that it identify a site for necessary provision.

A Member also expressed concern about the methodology utilised at the time of a previous count of rough sleepers. He considered that there was a greater problem than the figure suggested, and the matter had not been resourced appropriately as a consequence. In response, the Director reminded Members that the rough sleeper count had been carried out in consultation with various voluntary organisations working with homeless people to ensure it was accurate. He also pointed out that Winchester had a generous supply of direct access hostel accommodation. He recognised that it might be necessary to carry out another count in due course.

RESOLVED:

That the progress of the Housing General Fund and Community Development Services financial outturn for the 2005/06 financial year be noted.

11. **HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S REPORT – FIRST QUARTER PERFORMANCE - HOUSING GENERAL FUND AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**
(Report SO27 refers)

The Panel noted that the impending inspection by the Audit Commission of the Strategic Housing Division would impinge on staff resources at that time.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Panel notes progress of the Housing General Fund and Community Development Services 1st Quarter Performance 2006/07.

12. **ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH AND SAFETY PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S REPORT - FIRST QUARTER PERFORMANCE – COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**
(Report SO28 refers)

The Director of Communities advised that related figures from Hampshire Police to Performance Indicators for Community Safety and Well-being would be reported with the half yearly figures at the next meeting of the Panel.

RESOLVED:

That the progress of the Community Development Services First Quarter Performance 2006/07 be noted.

13. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme for the Panel as set out in Report PS226, be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 9.30pm.

Chairman