

SOCIAL ISSUES SCRUTINY PANEL

23 October 2006

Attendance:

Councillors:

Hammerton (Chairman) (P)

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

Quar (P)
Nunn (P)
Stephens
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 Holder for Environment, Health and Safety)

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Howell.

2. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 17 July 2006 be approved and adopted.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

No comments were received or statements made.

4. **ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR UPDATE**

(Oral Report)

Councillor Tait declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest in this item, as a member of the Winchester District Neighbourhood Mediation Service and he spoke and voted thereon.

The Director of Communities gave the Panel a presentation on Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in Winchester.

In summary, the presentation set out the definition of ASB, how the Council responds to complaints (which included Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, Anti Social Behaviour Orders and Injunctions), breaches of behaviour contracts/orders and the scope of the Council's powers in relation to housing. The Panel also noted the role of Neighbourhood Wardens, mediation and level of partnership working that existed regarding this issue.

The Chairman thanked the Director for the presentation and, in response to a Member's comment, it was noted that there may be some scope to improve the flow of information between the Council and Bishops Waltham Police Station.

The Director also clarified that Council tenants whose property had been re-possessed because of their anti-social behaviour, would be considered as intentionally homeless and that this information would be shared with other social landlords.

The Panel also discussed the relatively high turnover of the Neighbourhood Warden staff and passed on their best wishes to their manager, Ms J Naylor, who was due to leave the Council shortly.

RESOLVED:

That the Report be noted.

5. **HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO – SECOND QUARTER 2006/07 PERFORMANCE MONITORING FOR HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT SERVICES (LESS EXEMPT APPENDIX 5)**
(Report SO29 refers)

The Director of Communities and Councillor Coates responded to detailed questions regarding the information contained in the Report.

From this, the Panel particularly focused on the poor performance of the Council's contractor to turn around void properties within an acceptable timeframe. The Director explained that this affected the HRA in terms of lost rent and was a source of inconvenience to prospective tenants. However, he anticipated that a change to procedures and a fully staffed section would lead to a significant improvement in performance. He added that any lost revenue in rent from this would be sought from the contractor.

The Panel noted that TACT's comments were set out in the exempt appendix and were explained by Mr Rickman at the meeting. In summary, their comments raised significant concerns about the repairs performance of the contractor, the number of complaints they received regarding this service, and difficulties they experienced in engaging with the contractor.

In response, the Director shared many of the frustrations raised by TACT, but explained that all tenants were given prepaid comment cards on completion of their repairs and from the 30% that were returned, only 1% were negative. However, Mr Rickman added that, anecdotally, many tenants who felt that they had received a poor standard of repair did not see any point in returning these forms.

The Panel noted that the terms of the repairs and maintenance contract had been set for a ten year period from 2001 and was RPI linked. However, there had been significant cost increases, especially in regard to labour, which outstripped RPI

inflation, so that this element of the contract had to be subsidised from more profitable elements. In reply to questions, the Director explained that it may be possible to re-tender these elements of the contract, but that could jeopardise the whole contract, may result in a more expensive outcome and, with a largely fixed budget, could result in less work being done to the detriment of tenants. The Panel also noted that whilst a ten year term was reasonable for the entire contract (which included waste collection etc), where they were used, most other Local Authorities had shorter terms for housing repairs and maintenance.

At the conclusion of debate, the Panel noted that a monitoring report on the contract would be considered by the Principal Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting to be held on 4 December 2006, and Councillor Coates reiterated that the principal problem was the speed of the repairs (especially on void properties), rather than the quality of the work produced.

RESOLVED:

1. That the monitoring information contained in the Report be noted.
2. That, during their discussions on the contract monitoring report, Principal Scrutiny Committee be asked to consider the concerns of the Panel and TACT as set out above.

6. **HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO – SECOND QUARTER 2006/07 PERFORMANCE MONITORING FOR HOUSING GENERAL FUND AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**
(Report SO30 refers)

The Director of Communities and Councillor Coates responded to detailed questions regarding the information contained in the Report, including the targets for the number of completed affordable homes and how this could be increased further.

The Panel also noted the success of the Neighbourhood Wardens and that Hampshire County Council was organising a presentation to be held on 19 November 2006 regarding the Draft Gipsy and Travellers Survey.

RESOLVED:

That the monitoring information contained in the Report be noted.

7. **ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH AND SAFETY PORTFOLIO – SECOND QUARTER 2006/07 PERFORMANCE MONITORING FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**
(Report SO31 refers)

The Director of Communities and Portfolio Holder responded to detailed questions regarding the information contained in the Report.

RESOLVED:

That the monitoring information contained in the Report be noted.

8. **CONSULTATION ON DRAFT COMMUNITY STRATEGY 2006 ONWARDS**
(Report SO32 refers)

The Chief Executive explained that Cabinet had considered the draft Community Strategy on 11 October 2006 (Report CAB1332 refers). The Panel was asked to consider the proposals and to review the overall benefit to the public from services provided by the Council and other relevant organisations.

During debate, the following amendments to the Strategy were recommended to Cabinet:

- Page 12 (Outcome 1: Health and Wellbeing) and all subsequent references to include: “That there is a marked reduction in the numbers of people who have to wait to find homes in the District – especially affordable homes”
- To include a “strong base of Council houses at affordable rents”

Following debate, the Panel agreed to submit any further comments Members may have on the Strategy to the Chief Executive following the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet be asked to take into account the above proposals (and any subsequent changes submitted by Panel Members to the Chief Executive) when it finalises the Community Strategy for recommendation to Council.

9. **CONSULTATION ON DRAFT CORPORATE STRATEGY 2007-2012**
(Report SO336 refers)

The Chief Executive explained that Cabinet had considered the draft Corporate Strategy 2007-2012 (Report CAB1334 refers) on 11 October 2006. In addition, Cabinet had approved a revised draft version of the Corporate Strategy for consultation, copies of which had been circulated to Panel Members prior to the meeting (Addendum to CAB1334 refers).

The Scrutiny Panels were asked to consider this revised version of the Strategy to review the overall benefit to the public from services provided by the Council and other relevant organisations.

During debate, the Panel highlighted the following issues as concerns and suggested the following changes to the document:

- To amend the wording of “the District offers high value jobs” to “the District provides a range of jobs”
- To add: “Ensure an adequate housing supply to support the local economy, including affordable housing.”
- To delete “centre” from “Improve air quality in Winchester town centre.”

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet be recommended to consider the above changes to the draft Corporate Strategy to ensure that the work of the Council is directed to meet the needs of the local community.

10. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**
(Report PS246 refers)

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Work Programme, as set out on the reverse of the agenda, and as extracted from Report PS246, be noted.

11. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

RESOLVED:

1. That in all the circumstances, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

2. That the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business because it is likely that, if members of the public were present, there would be disclosure to them of 'exempt information' as defined by Section 100I and Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

<u>Minute Number</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Description of Exempt Information</u>
##	Housing and Communities Portfolio – Second Quarter 2006/07 Performance Monitoring for HRA (Exempt Appendix 5 – TACT Comment)) Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). (Para 3 Schedule 12A refers)

12. **HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO – SECOND QUARTER 2006/07 PERFORMANCE MONITORING FOR HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT SERVICES (EXEMPT APPENDIX 5)**
(Report SO29 refers)

The Panel noted the comments of TACT and these were as discussed above.

RESOLVED:

That the exempt appendix be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 9.20pm

Chairman