

**SOCIAL ISSUES SCRUTINY PANEL**

**5 December 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 Holder for Environment, Health and Safety)

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1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Quar and Deputy Member Councillor Worrall.

2. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 October 2006 be approved and adopted.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

No comments were received or statements made.

4. **DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS 2007 ONWARDS**  
(Report SO34 refers)

Councillors Hammerton and Pearson declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest in this item, as they were both members of the Bishops Waltham Citizens Advice Bureau Committee (Councillor Hammerton was its Chair) which indirectly received Council funding via the Health Improvement Partnership (HISI). They both spoke and voted thereon.

Councillor Izard also declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest in this item as he worked for a Registered Social Landlord partner of the Council. Councillor Love also declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest in this item as he was the Chair of the Winchester Inclusive Housing Forum. They both spoke and voted thereon.

During its consideration of the Report, the Panel referred to a revised draft version of the Corporate Strategy for consultation, as approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 11 October 2006 (Addendum, Version 1.2 to CAB1334 refers).

The Chief Executive and Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health and Safety reminded the Panel that it was asked to consider the priorities set out in the Appendix to the Report and whether it considered them appropriate and whether any additional savings could be achieved. The Panel was also reminded that some budget changes shown in the Appendix to the Report were crosscutting and relevant to all Scrutiny Panels and were therefore the same items.

During debate, the Director of Communities answered a number of detailed questions on the information contained within the Appendices to the Report.

In response to these, the Panel noted that the reinstatement of capital budget for Affordable Housing/Regeneration (S22) was dependent on endorsement by Council of Cabinet's and Principal Scrutiny Committee's approval of a programme of vacant dwelling disposals (Report CAB1336 refers).

The Panel also noted that recurring savings attributed to Organisational Development (S13), was an ongoing process and currently at consultation stage for a major review of service delivery process. Noting this, the Panel questioned whether the ongoing savings as presented were achievable from 2007/08.

Questioning the low priority given to the Salix Finance Bid (S12), the Director explained the scheme was relatively new and may require further investigation before its inclusion in next year's budget. The Panel also noted the Director's explanation of the potential to generate income from the Houses in Multiple Occupation Accreditation Scheme (S16). The Panel also discussed the importance of the revenue growth bid for the Winchester Centre Rent Review (S9).

Responding to concerns raised, the Director clarified that provision had previously been committed within the base budget to 2011/12 for the contribution to the Health Improvement Partnership (HISI) (S14). He advised that its withdrawal had followed that of Hampshire County Council, and that assurances had been given that all existing obligations of the Partnership were to be met.

In relation to the General Fund contribution to the Knowle Community Building (S29), the Director responded to questions regarding the developer's contribution regarding this facility. The Panel was anxious that the eventual outcome regarding this should not be at the expense of the local community, nor the Council.

In relation to a priority growth bid for Choice Based Lettings (CBL) (S3), the Director explained that this Council's contribution was its 40% share of the Governments funding previously awarded and was the same contribution as made by other Local Authorities for 2007/08. Thereafter the costs outlined for 2008/09 onwards were the estimated annual revenue costs for the Council of running its element of the sub-regional CBL system. The scheme was statutory and had a number of advantages both for the tenant, and for the Council's allocations procedures.

Noting the one-off cost associated with a new Private Sector House Survey (S7), the Director reported that this was a statutory requirement to establish a baseline of 'fitness' of the private housing stock of the District. The Government required that 75% of private sector homes occupied by vulnerable households had to be 'fit' by 2010.

The Panel were in agreement that the service provided to vulnerable residents by the Meals on Wheels Service (S15) was important. The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities acknowledged this and reported on a Hampshire County Council intention to review the scheme's operation. He added that other District Councils had previously withdrawn their contribution but the service had continued nevertheless.

A Member highlighted the inconvenience to vulnerable tenants of faulty heating systems (S26). The Director assured the Panel that processes for emergency repairs was mindful of this. The associated capital growth bids for a programme of replacements would also be beneficial in terms of providing more reliable and energy efficient systems.

Following further debate of the priorities as set out in the Appendix to the Report, the Panel agreed to recommend to Cabinet changes as summarised in the Resolution below.

**RESOLVED:**

**1. That Cabinet be recommended that relative priorities for the budget as set out in the Report be agreed, subject to the following changes:**

- (i) Reduce the priority - Local Development Framework preparation (S1)**
- (ii) Increase the priority - Expansion of the Alcohol Exclusion Zone and Outreach work (S10)**
- (iii) Increase the priority - Winchester Centre Rent Review (S9)**

**2. That Cabinet be requested to consider the following as part of its development of the budget:**

- (i) That Cabinet needs to be confident that the substantial revenue savings proposed from Organisational Development (S13) are achievable in full from 2007/08.**
- (ii) That with regard to withdrawal of both the Council's contribution to the Health Improvement Partnership (HISI) (S14) and to Meals and Wheels (S15), Cabinet needs to be confident that this does not adversely impact on delivery of the Council's Corporate Priority of 'Safe and Strong Communities'.**

**3. That Cabinet be informed that the Panel was unable to identify any further savings.**

5. **HOUSING RENTS AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET 2007/08**  
(Report SO36 refers)

Mr Rickman advised that TACT was to meet on 6 December 2006 and that their comments would be reported to Cabinet on 13 December 2007, as part of its consideration of the proposals.

The Panel referred to paragraphs 1.3 (a) – (f) of the Report and discussed the proposals to assist with addressing the potential deficit to the HRA.

The Director answered questions regarding an increase of garage rents and, further to this, the Panel was generally supportive of the proposals. Although appreciative that the rise could create an initial period of voids, the Panel was keen that non-tenants pay a more appropriate market rent for their garage. The Council should also continue to investigate instances of sub-letting and other activities contrary to the terms of the letting agreement.

The Panel was also in support of an increase to the General Fund Contribution for Grounds Maintenance, to reflect that the percentage of owner-occupier homes on some estates had increased over time.

The Panel referred to the options for actual rent increases and the Director explained how statutory guidelines and capping was accounted for in proposing the two options. In summary, the Director stated that Option 2 (at paragraph 2.5 (b)) was more advantageous for those in sheltered accommodation and that those hard-to-let properties could potentially become more popular, by effectively reducing these rents. However, Option 1 (at paragraph 2.5 (a)) had the less adverse impact to the majority of tenants and was therefore being recommended for endorsement by Cabinet.

Following further discussion, the Panel supported Option 1 as it was considered that Option 2 would have minimal impact in addressing the numbers of long-term voids in sheltered accommodation.

**RESOLVED:**

**1. That Cabinet be informed that the Panel supports the proposals to address the potential budget deficit as set out in the Report, subject to the comments above as summarised below:**

**(i) That Cabinet satisfies itself that suitable procedures will be put in place to minimise any sub-letting of garages and other activities contrary to the terms of the letting agreement.**

**2. That the Panel supports Option 1 of paragraph 2.5 of the Report for rent increases.**

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

The Chairman announced the following arrangements for meetings of Informal Scrutiny Groups:

- Housing Information Systems Informal Scrutiny Group – Tuesday 9 January 2007 at 5pm.
- Former Tenant Arrears Informal Scrutiny Group – Thursday 18 January 2007 at 4pm.

RESOLVED:

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

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 8.25pm

Chairman