

THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 JANUARY 2016

ANNUAL REVIEW OF INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

REPORT OF HEAD OF POLICY AND MAJOR PROJECTS

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REFERENCES:

- [OS0108](#) Fuel Poverty Reduction Informal Scrutiny Group, 27 October 2014
- [OS0109](#) Annual Review of informal Scrutiny Group Recommendations, 27 October 2014.
- [CAB2638](#) Flooding Informal Scrutiny Group, 3 December 2014.
- [OS0114](#) Domestic Violence Informal Scrutiny Group Recommendations, 19 January 2015.
- [OS0118](#) Abbey House Informal Scrutiny Group Recommendations, 19 January 2015.
- [OS0121](#) Homelessness Informal Scrutiny Group Recommendations, 23 March 2015.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report provides a 12 month review of the progress against the recommendations of the Informal Scrutiny Groups listed in paragraph 1.2 of the Report.

RECOMMENDATION:

That progress against the implementation of the recommendations of the Informal Scrutiny Groups listed in paragraph 1.2 of the Report and detailed in Appendix 1 be noted and any issues raised with the relevant Portfolio Holder.

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DETAIL:

1. Introduction

1.1 This Report presents the annual update on the progress achieved against the recommendations arising from the Informal Scrutiny Groups that concluded their reviews during the last twelve months.

1.2 Those Informal Scrutiny Groups were as follows:

- Fuel Poverty Informal Scrutiny Group,
- Flooding Informal Scrutiny Group,
- How we respond as a City Council to Domestic Violence Informal Scrutiny Group,
- Abbey House Informal Scrutiny Group,
- How we respond as a City Council to Homelessness Informal Scrutiny Group,

1.3 Appendix 1 to this Report provides details of the recommendations arising from the work of each of the Informal Scrutiny Group's and an update on the progress that has been achieved to date.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

2. COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND PORTFOLIO PLANS (RELEVANCE TO :)

2.1 The carrying out of scrutiny reviews supports the Community Strategy outcome of being an efficient and effective Council.

3. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no significant resource implications arising from this report.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

4.1 There are no specific risks associated with the recommendations put forward in this report.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Informal Scrutiny Group recommendations and 12 month reviews.

Fuel Poverty Informal Scrutiny Group

1. That funds be deployed to support the delivery of Hampshire County Council's 'Hitting the Cold Spots' and WinACC's 'Home Energy Advice Resource' - complementary schemes that signpost, support and offer emergency assistance to residents living in fuel poverty. This includes the deployment of £55,204 in 2014-15 and £59,148 in 2015-16 for both schemes.

2014/15

£45,000 – Hitting the Cold Spots (HTCS)

£10,204 – Home Energy Advice Resource (HEART)

2015/16

£37,000 – Hitting the Cold Spots (HTCS)

£22,148 – Home Energy Advice Resource (HEART)

As set out above, the two schemes work in a complementary way to signpost, support and offer emergency assistance to residents living in fuel poverty. 'Hitting the Cold Spots' helps home-owners and private tenants, whilst the WinACC scheme is focussed on social housing tenants, primarily by providing a training and casework support service to people - ranging from housing officers to Age UK volunteers - who would be able to spot and support people to reduce their energy bills. Both schemes have proved harder to implement than might have been anticipated, as the feedback below makes clear. Both schemes have evolved as a result of the first year's experiences, and both organisations are keen to continue reaching out to those most at risk of fuel poverty with the help of this targeted budget from the Council.

Hitting the Cold Spots (HTCS)

The Hitting the Cold Spots (HTCS) service has been actively engaging with statutory and voluntary organisations across the Winchester district to raise awareness of the support available. Project materials have been updated with the Winchester offer for targeted engagement. These communications activities have reached approximately 350 staff, volunteers and Winchester residents. The project has so far actively supported 41 households in the Winchester District.

An example of one recipient of intensive support is as follows:

Mr S, 69, lives alone. He was referred to the project by Trading Standards as his hot water system and fridge were broken. Mr S suffers from arthritis, ulcerated legs & feet which has resulted in limited mobility. He was admitted to hospital shortly after contacting the project.

The HTCS Advisor liaised with the hospital discharge team to ensure adequate handover. The discharge team made a referral to the Meals on Wheels and to Hampshire Crisis Information and Advice line to support the purchase of a new fridge. Soon after Mr S returned home the HTCS Advisor visited to provide oil-filled radiators for additional warmth. HTCS's involvement resulted in:

- *A new central heating system being installed to replace the single gas fire & failed*

- multi-point water heater (funded by HTCS)*
- *Support from CAB to access income maximisation support and to set up standing orders to better manage energy bill payments*
- *A new fridge being provided by HCIA*
- *Home fire safety visit from Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service*
- *A carbon monoxide monitor provided by HTCS*

Mr S was supported over 5 months and visited 7 times.

Due to a number of factors, including recent mild winters, a lack of detailed information around the most energy inefficient properties in Winchester and boundaries limiting client eligibility, delivery of the project has proved challenging. In addition, the need to source match funding and the complex needs of those requiring support has taken substantial time and resource to deliver, for example, one client has required seven visits over five months to successfully resolve the multifaceted issues faced. There is currently a £35,125 underspend on practical energy efficiency interventions for 2014/15, however £19,000 of this has been ring fenced for the first time Central Heating Fund Project (see below), leaving a remaining underspend of £15,425.

Going forward, HCC anticipates greater calls on project resources as HTCS has secured funding to install first time central heating through a Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) scheme. This opportunity will be actively promoted and offered to Winchester district residents in 2015/16.

In addition, a communications plan for 2015/16 has been developed which builds upon 2014/15 activities to ensure maximum uptake of the service during 2015/16. HCC has purchased Energy Performance Certificate data for the Winchester CC area which identifies the worst performing, most energy inefficient properties in the area. This new data will be used to effectively target residents in those properties likely to be suffering from fuel poverty.

With the renewed focus on the Central Heating Fund, the EPC Data targeting and the Communications Plan, HCC requests that in addition to the £37,000 allocated for 2015/16, the HTCS underspend of £15,425 from 2014/15 is carried forward to 2015/16 to support enhanced activity levels within the Winchester district.

Home Energy Advice Resource (HEART)

Only half of the £10,204 allocated to WinACC's 'Home Energy Advice Resource' in 2014/2015 was actually used because the service got off to a slow start. There were several reasons for this including delays in confirming the grant and personnel changes in some of the main voluntary sector agencies. As a result of changes in personnel at the Council, the remaining £5,102 was not carried forward at year end.

Overall, the WinACC service is meeting targets for the number of training events held; though the total number of advisers trained was lower than forecast. WinACC is now working closely with Citizens Advice Winchester District and expects numbers to increase significantly this winter. There has been surprisingly little interest in the follow-up casework support service. WinACC hopes this will increase as the cold

weather starts. They are publicising their service again, and more widely. WinACC has also been successful in securing Big Energy Saving Network funding from the Department of Energy and Climate Change for winter 2015/2016, which will enable them to reach more residents directly to offer help to reduce their energy bills.

Two recent examples of positive outcomes from HEART visits to housing association tenants are as follows:

A was suffering damp, as were others in the same development. The adviser found that the heat recovery units had broken down, and tenants were all following instructions and keeping their windows closed. The solution was simply to replace the batteries in the units in all flats.

B had to control her heating by switching individual radiators on and off because no-one had told her how to use the controls. It took the HEART two hours to discover that of the four buttons on her household heating control, one controlled upstairs heating, one downstairs, and the other two nothing. She can now control her own heating much more effectively.

It is requested that £10,000 of the sum allocated to WinACC for 2015/2016 be carried forward into 2016/2017, so that the decision about the best use of the remaining funds to support further action on fuel poverty can be taken in the light of an evaluation to be carried out at the end of the winter.

2. **That the forthcoming Energy Strategy for Council-owned properties prioritises fuel-poor households (SAP rating E, F or G and low household income) for energy efficient enhancements. The strategy must provide a cost benefit analysis on fuel efficient technologies, which can be used as guidance for private homeowners/tenants and landlords across the District.**

The approach to energy management in existing Council properties will form part of a wider Asset Management Strategy for Council Housing due for completion in the summer of 2016. Prioritising "fuel poor" households is already underway and incorporated into Housing Revenue Account investment plans. An initial cost benefit analysis has been prepared and shared with members through a recent briefing on Housing Maintenance

3. **That Housing Services continue to proactively introduce and pilot fuel efficient technologies, and subsequently acquire the necessary expertise to identify which technology is best suited to the property type and household make-up.**

Trials of renewable energy technology, part funded by DECC, are underway. However, the trials have achieved mixed results and technology remains expensive even with grant funding. Initial cost benefit analysis does not support continued investment at this stage

4. **That in support of the Private Sector Housing stock condition survey £4,000 be allocated to the survey costs required to generate strategic fuel poverty data for the District, and the remaining funds (c. £1,600) be reserved for targeting and directing those households identified as fuel poor to the services of**

Hitting the Cold Spots and the Home Energy Advice Resource.

The Private Sector Housing Survey has now been completed. The results and proposals for how they will impact on future services will be discussed at Cabinet housing Committee on 2 February 2016.

- 5. That the Housing Services' leaflet 'Keep your home free from Condensation, Damp and Mould' be reviewed by the TACT readers panel to ensure the effectiveness of ventilation alongside heating is highlighted, and then used to raise further awareness amongst Council tenants.**

The leaflet was reviewed in detail by the TACT Readers Panel who unanimously approved its content as useful information for tenants. It remains a key element of advice to tenants.

- 6. That the Council actively seeks to participate in appropriate and significant networks to learn and share best practice in this area.**

The Council is represented at the Hampshire Energy Efficiency Partnership, a county wide network of local authorities that reviews and researches opportunities, shares best practice and promotes a wide range of local and national initiatives to residents.

Flooding Informal Scrutiny Group

- 1. That the important benefits of local community emergency planning groups be promoted in parishes and the Winchester town area.**

The importance of local community emergency planning groups is recognised. Work is continuing to establish contact with local groups and to date 15 local plans have been prepared. The County Council holds annual workshops for Parishes to help them to develop their plans with the last one held on 26 November 2015 and this was hosted by Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service at Winnall Fire Station. Within the Town area the Ward Members play a significant role and a Member Briefing was held on 24 November 2015 which updated Councillors on the works that have been completed in the Town to improve flood defences and the role that Members can play in the event of an emergency.

- 2. That clear channels of communication be promoted, including telephone numbers for the public to contact the City Council and also to provide plain English advice in the City Council's outward facing publications, including its website.**

The public information bulletins from the 2013/14 floods have been saved and updated to provide information for example on the supply of sandbags, the use of water pumps and using washing machines and toilets during floods. In the event of an emergency the Customer Service Centre will handle public calls for information, with calls for assistance being transferred to the Emergency Control Centre/ Tactical Coordination Group. The Council's Communications Team are well prepared in the needs to support an emergency through multiple media channels and are partners of the Local Resilience Forum Media Plan.

- 3. That the City Council review measures for the protection of its own property, including its housing stock.**

There are plans for the Council to protect its own property through the Estates Department for at risk units such as the River Park Leisure Centre. A portable flood barrier has been purchased to help defend the Park Avenue area from future flooding. The housing stock is maintained by Property Services who evaluate the risk of flooding and take appropriate measures.

- 4. That a briefing be held for Members on emergency planning and flooding, so that Ward Members are best placed to help their parishes and town wards.**

The latest Member briefing was held on 24 November 2015 and included an update on the capital works that had been completed to assist in flood defence and the role of Members.

- 5. That the benefits of emergency planning be promoted through the media, including details of where to obtain additional information.**

There are national campaigns to prepare for winter weather, such as those jointly prepared by the Met Office and the Environment Agency with regards to

flooding, and reference to these is placed on the City and County's Council's websites as winter approaches.

6. That the City Council prepares a model Community Emergency Plan that can be adapted for parish use using existing best practice.

The City uses the community plan that has been developed by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Resilience Forum and this has formed the basis of the 15 Community Plans that have been prepared for the District. As previously mentioned, annual workshops are held to assist communities in the development of their plans and members of the Emergency Planning staff regularly attend Parish meetings to give guidance.

7. That the local knowledge and expertise of the existing drainage engineers on the City Council staff be captured, and that consideration be given to appointing an apprentice drainage engineer.

The local knowledge and expertise of the existing drainage engineers has been captured by the Project Team and now forms part of a flooding handbook which can be used to respond to future flooding events. Personnel Committee, at its meeting held on 29 September 2015, have approved proposals to build staff resilience in the Streetcare and Drainage Sections of the Council (Report PER276 refers).

8. That the trigger mechanisms be defined for when local communities operating their plans in response to a local incident need to involve the Tactical Coordination Group (TCG).

This remains a matter of judgement depending on the circumstances of the incident. For 999 calls the Police will contact the County Council and City Council when Local Authority support is required. The County and City hold contact details of the Community Plan leads and can establish dialogue at an early point to decide on the actions to take and what assistance is required. Where there is a longer lead-in to an event, such as flooding, the City would establish communication routes in advance so that a coordinated approach can be taken. The workshops with the community groups are helpful in establishing this understanding.

9. That a copy of all local Flood Action Plans and Emergency Plans be held by the City Council.

Copies of the Plans are held on Resilience Direct, which is a web based emergency planning aid and allows password protected access to all registered users. This system was explained to Members at the Emergency Planning training held on 24 November 2015.

10. That the TCG be properly equipped to deal with a Multi Agency Response, including robust communications equipment.

Work is continuing with the Council's IMT Section to improve the communications equipment in the TCG, including computer and telephone linkage. The creation of an alternative space to the Boardroom, West Wing, is being kept under review.

- 11. That consideration be given to making representations to Government to allow the County Council to raise additional funding through a one-off council tax levy, which could be used to resolve flooding problems.**

The County Council did apply for additional funding from Central Government via the Environment Agency for further investigation and practical measures to alleviate flooding. It was therefore not necessary to pursue this suggestion.

- 12. That local communities be encouraged to hold an appropriate store of diversion road signs and fluorescent work wear together with a plan of potential road diversion routes so that they can self help when road closures were required.**

This subject was taken up with the County Council. Hampshire Highways would normally only advocate this in an area such as Hambledon where known diversions are documented as this action could possibly put the public at risk otherwise.

- 13. That shared IT, such as Google Docs, be used so that the City Council's plans and Community Plans can be visible to all parties and updates shared.**

Resilience Direct now provides this functionality.

- 14. That detailed Met Office information be shared with Parish Councils and Flood Action Groups.**

This action will take place in the event of repeat flooding. The Met Office and the Environment Agency have jointly developed methods to disseminate weather information including mobile phone apps. The Met Office operate a web based system called Hazard Manger for emergency planning users and this information can be shared with community groups as required.

- 15. That representatives of the emergency services, villages and other contributors be thanked for their input into the work of the ISG.**

Noted.

How the City Council Responds to Domestic Violence Informal Scrutiny Group

1. **Put in place a formal partnership arrangement between Winchester City Council and the Refuge by developing a Memorandum of Understanding/Protocol between the two.**

Housing Options are happy to support this area of work. However the management of the refuge has changed recently so the overall objective may need to be revisited in terms of the content.

2. **Investigate the possibility of increasing the number of Band 2 supported housing units by a further 10 e.g. identify unit locations and funding/grant opportunities.**

Housing Options are pleased to advise that we have been successful through a recent Hampshire wide central government (DCLG) funding bid in securing 4 extra units of move on accommodation. The funding has provided Winchester with an opportunity to secure 3 private rented sector moving on units and 1 longer term move on provision through a new build scheme. The new units of refuge move on accommodation will be allocated via the housing options team. Residents will also be supported through our housing advice duties to access private rented accommodation as a viable move on option as we are able to discharge our main housing duty through a private rented sector offer. The Council now has its own 'City Lets' private rented sector scheme and has to date secured 11 properties through this route.

3. **Ask the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services to review the corporate policy related to the allocation of housing and consider if there is an opportunity to provide more permanent accommodation at an earlier stage for those fleeing domestic violence.**

Currently residents within the refuge who approach WCC for housing assistance are already prioritised through the scheme of allocation. Residents who submit a homeless person application to WCC will be awarded a band 2 status on the housing register (once the main housing duty is accepted). As mentioned the Council can also assist with move on accommodation through its own 'City Lets' private rented scheme as well as through a social housing offer

4. **Actively support the work of Winchester Domestic Violence and Abuse Forum by ensuring a room is made available to them for their meetings up to a maximum of 3 times per annum. [Update: The Trinity Centre has since offered the Winchester Domestic Violence & Abuse Forum a meeting room to hold their meetings at no cost].**

Meetings will now be held at the Trinity Centre.

5. **Improve the opportunity for education and awareness training for all frontline staff and councillors in relation to Domestic Violence disclosure and access to support services e.g. ensure that staff and elected members are aware of the corporate policy around domestic violence.**

This is work in progress; there is a corporate working group whose membership is made up from Heads of Team's. The aim of the group is to look at

safeguarding which includes Domestic Violence, as the draft policy is currently under review. Domestic Violence is part of the wider safeguarding agenda which will involve training and awareness raising about corporate policy and dealing with disclosure. There is however information on the intranet with details about support services in the Organisational Development section.

- 6. Increase awareness opportunities for customers of the City Council by updating the corporate website to ensure helpline numbers are readily available, service web links are easily accessible and literature via customer services/reception/putting information on Council owned public conveniences etc. (healthy relationships) is provided.**

This is also a work in progress. The Community Safety Team has incorporated training and awareness around statutory duty within the role of a part-time post we have recruited to. That officer will be using social media, updating Community Safety web pages and generally scoping what's available in terms of current literature etc. The Housing Directory of Services includes a list of DA helplines and the Community Safety Team has put out a press release, sent out twitter messages and utilised the WCC reception screen to highlight the White Ribbon campaign in the week leading up to and including the event, which took place 25th November.

- 7. Actively encourage the Police & Crime Commissioner to commission the continuation/expansion of the IDVA service at a local level (Independent Domestic Violence Advocates).**

*In the Hampshire County Council area (HCC), the OPCC supports the commissioned IDASH contract (integrated Domestic Abuse Service Hampshire) which includes IDVA, refuge, outreach, children and families work and group work. The lead commissioner is Hampshire County Council and funding was pooled from the OPCC, HCC (Adult Services, Children's Services, Public Health and Troubled Families). The OPCC contribution is £310,000 pa. Contracts were awarded in three geographical lots covered by one service specification. This has eliminated post code lotteries of services depending where a victim lives, filled gaps and reduced duplication. **The contract has seen an increase of IDVA provision across the Hampshire County Council area from 4.5 to 9.5 IDVAs.** We have been told that there is also increased community outreach and better move on and re-settlement. The new contract started 1st April 2015 and is for two years with the option of extending for one year plus one year. Hampshire County Council and the OPCC will work in partnership with successful providers during the implementation phase of the contracts to ensure that outcomes are service user focussed and realistic. The final version will therefore be agreed with providers after award of contract. Providers will be expected to work together and in partnership with commissioners to develop a consistent approach in the measurement of agreed outcomes. Performance against agreed outcomes in year 1 will be monitored in order to set targets from year 2 onwards.*

Abbey House Informal Scrutiny Group

- 1. That a rolling £50,000 per annum (total £250,000) refurbishment programme be phased as soon as possible so to facilitate increased use of Abbey House for internal officer meetings and some appropriate private hire, on the understanding that this use could be managed and staffed by the Guildhall or internal users so as to be least disruptive to the building's primary function as the official residence of the Mayor of Winchester. To bring the building up to minimum standard suitable for continued use and to make the premises available for Officer and Member internal meetings, it is recommended that a budget item be supported to fund a minimum of £250,000 that will need to be spent. It is suggested that this sum might be spread over five years to assist with budgeting. There is £59,000 already in the capital programme for Abbey House. Budget growth of £191,000 spread over the following 4 years will be needed, funded by the Asset Management Plan Reserve.**

Work is being undertaken to identify a solution for structural defects which have been identified in the building. These defects will be remedied as the first priority. Secondly a review of the lighting in the rooms will identify a means of improving the lighting which will be complementary to the building and enable better use to be made of them during the evenings.

The Energy Manager is investigating the options for improving the controlling of the heating system serving the building.

- 2. That approval of individual elements of the refurbishment programme be under the Portfolio Holder Decision Making scheme.**

Noted.

How the City Council responds to Homelessness Informal Scrutiny Group

- 1. The Council makes formal representations regarding County Council proposals for the redistribution of Supporting People funding for excluded groups, highlighting the likely impact on the district.**

The Portfolio Holder for Housing wrote to the lead for Adult Services regarding this matter and officers worked closely with County teams to ensure supported projects in the Winchester district gave appropriate priority to those with a local connection to the district.

- 2. A campaign be launched to raise awareness of rough sleepers in the parishes and rural areas.**

The Council wrote to all parish council leads to highlight the assistance available to rough sleepers, how to report rough sleepers and the relevant contact information both nationally and also the Housing Options teams direct contact details.

- 3. Consideration be given to the re-launch/re-promotion of the 'alternative giving scheme' campaign within the town centre to reduce begging and street activity and raise awareness of actual rough sleeping.**

The City Council is actively supporting the re-launch of this scheme in conjunction with the Winchester Bid.

- 4. A shared data base be established, funded from Homelessness Prevention Grant, to promote a 'no wrong door approach', ensuring all agencies supporting single homeless households can share data and outcomes of individual cases and all agencies being aware of written advice given and supporting the approach.**

"SafetyNet" is now being utilised for this purpose. "Task and Targetting" meetings with partner organisations have been arranged to review specific cases and to share information held by partners. All have agreed to use "SafetyNet" where possible to record intelligence.

- 5. That a report be brought to Cabinet (Housing) Committee as soon as possible reviewing options for addressing the gaps in stage 2 + 3 accommodation within the district.**

Discussions with HCC Commissioning officers continue to review options and also discussions with partner organisations operating supported housing projects have also been held to consider scope to increase provision in the district. The long term future of one key project is subject to detailed discussions and further information will be reported to Cabinet Housing Committee as soon as possible. The City Council has also amended provision at its own temporary accommodation to address current gaps in provision and to provide emergency accommodation.

6. **That the current level of front line resources in the Housing Options team be retained by making the fixed term Housing Options Officer post permanent.**

The fixed term post has been extended but remains reliant of the Homelessness Prevention Grant paid to the Council annually by the Government. The grant for 16/17 has now been confirmed.

7. **To continue to achieve the Gold Standard Local Challenges and to prepare a progress report for the Cabinet (Housing) Committee in October 2015.**

This has continued and very positive progress has been achieved, with the City Council now being one of the few authorities to have achieved "Silver" status, with successful assessments against five of the ten local challenges.

8. **To develop/improve liaison and protocols with all statutory agencies and to establish a district Homelessness Forum to provide opportunities for effective collaboration.**

The Forum is now established and has met twice, with all partners contributing towards the review of progress against the Council's Homelessness Prevention Strategy. Sub groups are now in place with leads from voluntary and statutory agencies to assist the Council in the delivery of the Strategy action plan.