

ECONOMY AND HOUSING POLICY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 1 July 2026

Attendance:

Councillors
Batho (Chairperson)

Morris
Achwal S
Murphy
Ablitt

Fleuren
Horrell
Cook

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Brophy

Other members in attendance:

Councillor Reach

Video recording of this meeting

1. **APOLOGIES AND DEPUTY MEMBERS.**

Apologies for the meeting were noted as above.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS.**

No declarations were made.

3. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRPERSON FOR THE 2026/27 MUNICIPAL YEAR.**

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Morris be appointed Vice-Chairperson for the 2025/26 municipal year.

4. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

No announcements were made.

5. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 23 FEBRUARY 2026.**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on the 23 February 2026 be approved and adopted.

6. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.**

There were no comments or questions made during public participation

1. **WINCHESTER CITY COUNCIL HOMELESSNESS SERVICE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION (LGR) CONSIDERATIONS**

The Chairperson introduced the agenda item and advised that he wished to deal with this agenda item in a more interactive format than for regular committee items. The session had been designed for members to understand the policy and resource challenges facing the council regarding Homelessness ahead of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and the creation of a new unitary authority. He explained that following an introduction, the committee would adjourn to work in two separate groups before reconvening to discuss their findings.

Simon Hendey, Strategic Director, Karen Thorburn, Corporate Head of Housing and Charlotte Quinn, Service Lead Strategic Housing provided an introduction which included the following points:

1. The meeting format would focus on case studies to explore practical choices and trade-offs, rather than reaching formal conclusions or recommendations.
2. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 had changed the system, focusing on early intervention, extending duties to all eligible households, and requiring proactive, personalised housing plans.
3. The council's housing options and homelessness service operated an open, accessible duty service, allowing immediate face-to-face advice and assistance.
4. The council had achieved a 56% success rate in preventing or relieving homelessness, exceeding the national target of 46.5%.
5. The service was supported by individual support officers, partnerships with local agencies, and the management of approximately 100 units of temporary accommodation, with a clear pathway to permanent housing through the Hampshire Home Choice register.

The committee proceeded to ask questions regarding the presentation and in summary, the following matters were raised:

1. A question was asked regarding the 104 duties to assist and why the government's target of 46.5% was so low.
2. Further clarification was sought regarding the Beacon and Citizens Advice, specifically the closure of West View and the level of pressure that closure placed on the department.

3. A question was raised regarding the remaining proportion of individuals not accounted for within the 56% rate.
4. A request was made for comparative data regarding other councils' performance to be presented at a separate meeting of the committee.

These points were responded to by Simon Hendey, Strategic Director, Karen Thorburn, Corporate Head of Housing and Charlotte Quinn, Service Lead Strategic Housing accordingly.

The committee adjourned to discuss the scenarios and upon reconvening, members were asked to feedback their comments and questions regarding the exercise and in summary the following points were made.

1. It was felt that the breakout group case studies provided an insight into the nuances of homelessness, balancing soft issues with strict regulations, and managing services within budget constraints.
2. Concerns were raised regarding the future financial implications of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), the integration of adult and children's services, and the differences in temporary accommodation spending and legislative interpretation between partnering councils.
3. The provision of support staff alongside statutory officers was highlighted as an effective "spend to save" measure that addressed issues early and prevented recurring homelessness.
4. The council's housing team was praised as a "gold standard" service, with specific commendation for flexible processes, the "told your story once" approach, and partnerships with local voluntary organisations.^[1]
5. It was suggested that Winchester's transparent and needs-based approach, along with mechanisms like Hampshire Home Choice, should be promoted as a model for the new unitary authority to adopt.
6. The geographic distribution of temporary accommodation was discussed, and that the majority of the council's 100 units were in central Winchester, and whether a temporary relocation across a wider county area was a viable option under a new unitary authority.
7. Clarification was sought on whether the committee could promote Winchester's model and ensure short-term funding protection for local partners, noting that the shadow authority would make future policy decisions.
8. The importance of documenting the financial rationale behind Winchester's approach was emphasised, specifically how investing in support officers generated savings in temporary accommodation costs, to ensure this methodology was not lost during the transition.

9. Concerns were raised regarding the impact of Hampshire County Council's financial pressures on the new unitary authority's homelessness budget, noting that ring-fenced government grants would continue and economies of scale might be achieved.
10. A question was asked regarding whether historic district boundaries should be disregarded in the future, and clarification was sought on the impact if neighbouring unitary authorities cut their services.
11. Further clarification was sought on how combining mental health and homelessness services under one unitary organisation would improve outcomes, noting that shared budgets, aligned goals, and co-location with social workers would prevent individuals from falling through gaps caused by separate organisational priorities.

These points were responded to by Councillor Batho, Chairperson, Councillor Mark Reach, Cabinet Member for Good Homes, Simon Hendey, Strategic Director, Karen Thorburn, Corporate Head of Housing, Charlotte Quinn, Service Lead Strategic Housing and Tara Hourigan, Housing Options Manager accordingly.¹

RESOLVED:

The committee agreed the following:

1. That the information provided through the case studies be noted and that generally members felt a greater appreciation and understanding of the policy and resource challenges facing the council regarding Homelessness.
2. The committee felt that members could act as ambassadors for the council's homelessness prevention model, sharing knowledge and best practice with councillors in other districts ahead of the formation of the new shadow unitary authority in April 2027.

8. **REVIEW OF THE ECONOMY AND HOUSING POLICY COMMITTEE RESOLUTIONS FOR 2025/26**

The Chairperson introduced the item, which was a review of the Economy and Housing Policy Committee resolutions for 2025/26. The introduction included the following points.

1. The review was an opportunity for members to reflect on items that had come before the committee during the previous year.

¹ Officers advised that Members were welcome to shadow Housing Options Officers while on duty to gain a clearer understanding of the role and the diverse situations encountered, and confirmed that such arrangements could be made via Tara Hourigan.

2. The report provided officer comments and responses to the resolutions that the committee had made.
3. It allowed the committee a final opportunity to ask questions or make comments on the previously discussed papers.

The committee was asked to note the responses to the Economy and Housing Policy committee's previous resolutions. The committee proceeded to ask questions and in summary, the following matters were raised:

1. A question was asked regarding the 2 July 2025 meeting on social housing regulations, specifically regarding the committee's comments and whether they were incorporated.
2. Two questions were asked regarding the 16 September 2025 Winchester District Tourism Strategy report. Firstly, whether the footfall data relating to the Boomtown Festival was available and secondly whether approaching cruise companies to offer attractions and invite business had been considered.

These points were responded to by Councillor Mark Reach, Cabinet Member for Good Gomes and Simon Hendey, Strategic Director accordingly.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

9. **TO NOTE THE COMMITTEES CURRENT WORK PROGRAMME.**

The Chairperson introduced the item and advised that the current work programme was being developed as the committee considered the type of work undertaken at this meeting. It would be developed to bring forward a list of activities and explore other topics in a similar manner. Cllr Batho asked the committee for suggestions for future topics, and the following matters were raised:

1. A suggestion was made to review the lessons learned from the recent Prosperity Board and its projects to inform future economic development.
2. Whether the committee could facilitate a discussion with charitable partners, for example Trinity to understand how to move forward and utilise available resources.
3. Whether the committee needed to review the role of the housing regulator, including delivery against key indicators and strategies.
4. A suggestion was made for further information on void homes, including the total number, the duration of vacancies, and the actions being taken to occupy them. This included private sector empty properties and whether action could be taken to increase housing availability in that sector.

5. A suggestion was made to review the District Tourism Strategy, focusing on the impact of the Local Government Reorganisation transition, strategies to increase overnight stays, and transport links.
6. A question was asked regarding the policy for providing disable facilities grants to residents for home modifications, and whether feedback from those supported could be shared.
7. Further clarification was sought on whether this committee would be able to liaise with Winchester Market regarding the mix and placement of stalls, and whether the market manager could be invited to explain the organisation of traders. In addition, a question was asked regarding the Christmas market, its mix of stalls, and whether the committee could be involved in its oversight. It was felt that the Winchester Town Forum may be best placed to deal with these items.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That further consideration be given to the suggestions put forward and that the forward plan be updated as necessary to reflect the suggested topics and presented back to the committee at the next meeting.

10. **TO NOTE THE DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS.**

The dates were noted

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 8.45 pm

Chairperson