

Minutes

Meeting of : Community & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Panel
Meeting held in : The Meeting Room, City Hall, Salisbury
Date : Wednesday 14 March 2007
Commencing at : 6.00 pm

District Councillors:

Councillor Mrs M I Evans (Chairman)
Councillor P J Leo (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors F D Bissington, B E Dalton, Mrs J A Green, Ms J Launchbury, C G Mills, A G Peach, B M Rycroft and Mrs S A Warrander.

Councillor Cole-Morgan, Portfolio Holder for Community and Housing was also in attendance

Apologies: A J A Brown-Hovelt, Mrs J M Greville, M A Hewitt and M J Osment

Tenants Panel:

Mr Edwards and Mr T Watkins

Apologies: Mr J Hinnis

Present - Officers:

Arabella Davies (Principal Democratic Services Officer), Pam Fox (Policy Director), Andrew Reynolds (Head of Strategic Housing), Derek Streek (Head of Housing Management) and Robin Townsend (Head of Community Initiatives)

235. Public Questions / Statement Time

Mr Duller of Harnham, Salisbury asked the following question:-

"I am concerned about the running of the Tenants' Panel. I have recently visited Salisbury Library to obtain the minutes of the meetings, but the last set that are available date back to six months ago. The minutes need to be available for public inspection.

Housing Matters Magazine makes reference to the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Tenants' Panel which should have been held in December. If an AGM is to be held then it must be advertised and information from the last AGM should be included. I believe this matter needs to be rectified. I hope that the Members will take this on board and officers will ensure that the Tenants' Panel is acting on behalf of the tenants in an appropriate manner. Tenants cannot be expected to take part in Council exercises if they are not aware of what is going on".

The Chairman thanked Mr Duller for his statement. Councillor Mrs Green, a member of the Tenants Panel added that the notice of the AGM has been circulated in Housing Matters Magazine and the date will be circulated to all residents living in tenanted properties in due course

236. Councillor Questions/Statement Time

Councillor Dalton stated that three years ago the Community and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel had investigated anti social behaviour (ASB). One of the outcomes of this review was that a decent quality leaflet in relation to ASB should be circulated to all residents in Salisbury District, providing them with a contact number should they have concerns or wish to report incidences of ASB.

This leaflet was not available for circulation with the Council Tax leaflet in 2006, but it was circulated approximately 3-4 months ago, apparently with other "junk" mail. As a result, most people may have inadvertently disposed of this informative leaflet. Councillor Dalton informed the Panel that this was not the outcome the review group had been hoping for.

Councillor Dalton added that he had also asked for an update from the relevant Service Unit on the relevant legislation in relation to ASB, but to date no further information has been provided.

Councillor Ms Launchbury informed the Panel that the Parishes of Morgan's Vale and Redlynch had also suffered recent bouts of ASB and no one there seemed to have seen the ASB leaflet that Councillor Dalton had referred to. Councillor Leo asked if it was possible to investigate whether the leaflet had been circulated in the Morgan's Vale and Redlynch areas.

The Head of Community Initiatives replied that a private distributor had been engaged to distribute the ASB leaflet. He informed Members of the Panel that he would look into this matter and reassess future distribution channels.

The Chairman requested that the Head of Community Initiatives report back to the Panel at its next meeting (20th June 2007).

237. Minutes:

Resolved – that the minutes of the last ordinary meeting held on 10th January 2007 (previously circulated), be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

238. Declarations of Interests:

There were none.

239. Chairman's Announcements:

The Chairman informed Members that this would be the last meeting of the Panel before the District and Parish Council Elections on 3rd May. The Chairman thanked Members for all the discussion items that they had brought to the Panel in the preceding four years. She wished those standing in the Elections the best of luck.

240. Single Homelessness

Mr Andrew Lord, Chief Executive of Alabare Christian Care was in attendance to provide members with an update on the work undertaken by Alabare in the Salisbury Area and the remodelling of Damascus House in Salisbury.

During his presentation, Mr Lord made the following points:-

Alabare's Vision, Mission and Values

"A society where everyone has the opportunity to enjoy a fulfilling life"

- To provide sustainable solutions for the community
- To provide high quality accommodation
- To overcome the barriers that people face

Long Term Goals

- To end homelessness
- To provide the right support
- To provide the right care
- To provide the right training

Overview

Alabare works with four key client groups (including those with learning difficulties and who are homeless), within four county council areas and it provides 50% of its services in Salisbury, including a drop in centre, hostels and move-on accommodation. In total, Alabare provides 52 bed spaces for homeless people in Salisbury.

Alabare's focus is on the cessation of homelessness. Frequent checks are undertaken to ensure that this is being achieved and so far, Alabare has managed a 70% success rate in achieving "move on".

Damascus House

Damascus house provides 33 bed spaces. It has 90% occupancy at any one time.

Damascus house is a 1960's building located in Barnard Street, Salisbury. Last summer a feasibility study was undertaken to assess whether the building was fit for purpose. The standards within the building are currently limited. For example eight people share one bathroom and all 33 people share one kitchen.

Large sums of money could be spent on refurbishing the building. The alternative solution would be to demolish the existing building and replace it with a building that is fit for purpose both now and in the future.

New Damascus House

The new building will be in line with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) – Places of Change - Tackling homelessness through the Hostels Capital Improvement Programme. Homelessness deskills and isolates individuals, so the challenge for Alabare is to work with homeless people in order to re-skill and re-integrate them.

The new Damascus House will need to be a welcoming building, e.g. non institutionalised décor, light and airy feel, open reception area. Staff on site will need to be motivated and people living with the building will need to feel safe, happy and trusted.

The design brief will be in line with DCLG best practice, will include 30+ bedrooms, rooms for couples, multi purpose rooms, be in line with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and may provide a drop in centre.

It is anticipated that the new building will take 2 years + to build, will cost approximately £2.5 million and funding for the project will come from Salisbury District Council, DCLG, Loans and Charitable organisations.

Salisbury District Council has already granted £0.5 million towards this project.

Mr Lord explained that accommodation is offered to predominantly single people, the majority of whom are aged 20 – 50 years. The Foyer, in Salisbury, provides an alternative for younger people.

People can remain in Damascus House for up to two years. Some people have stayed for longer, but two years is the recommended guidance.

Demand for accommodation is greater in winter months, but on average occupancy equates to 90%.

Alabare is currently in the process of seeking out alternative accommodation (from another charity, Wiltshire County Council and the private sector) in order to make provision for homeless people while the works to Damascus House are undertaken.

Move-On

Mr Lord then went on to inform Members of the other piece of work in which Alabare is involved – Move-On. Alabare had worked with Salisbury District Council and Westlea Housing to consider the purchase of up to 8 x 3 bedroom homes to provide move-on accommodation, with low level, day time support. This would enable people to move on from Damascus House and enable others to access the support provided within this facility.

Its your move

Its your move is another initiative currently being worked on by Alabare. This involves a tenancy training programme that is module based. This is a package that addresses issues such as preparing to move, providing social and life skills and money management skills. This programme is currently being run as a

pilot with 8 people, in a classroom setting. An evaluation of this project is to be undertaken shortly and if it appears that it has succeeded, it will be rolled out to other Alabare projects.

Following Mr Lord's presentation, the Chairman invited questions from Panel members:-

- Members asked if there was any way of overcoming the problems associated with benefits available and the earning power of individuals (the poverty trap).

Mr Lord replied that this was an issue Alabare was well aware of and consequently it set its rents at such a level, in an effort to avoid creating disincentives for people hoping to go out and work, including those on a part time basis.

- Members queried how Alabare and the Council assessed what was actually needed and how the problem of people staying on too long at Damascus House could be avoided. Members also queried how comparisons could be made in order to assess strengths and weaknesses.

The Head of Strategic Housing replied that comparisons could be made with Winchester, where a night shelter is provided for people sleeping rough. He added that there is a high demand in Salisbury, as illustrated by the Bannan report. Consequently, Salisbury offers a range of services across the city in order to meet the various needs of different people. In order to try and free up the movement of people within supported housing, this does rely on how different organisations work together, in order to identify, monitor and manage the need and deliver the right solutions.

- Members queried whether Damascus House was delivering the service it should be providing or if it was doing things that it should not because there were people dwelling there who should not be.

Mr Lord replied that Alabare had identified 32 people ready to move on in the next three months. He accepted that there were people who needed accommodation at Damascus House who were unable to access it at this moment in time and that there was a need for more services.

- Members asked how projects such as John Baker House, the Foyer and Alabare all worked together.

Mr Lord replied that Alabare did have a better understanding of how all the projects worked together and it was always engineered that residents went to the right project that best met their needs.

- Members asked if homeless people were from Salisbury or from elsewhere in the District/County and whether there was a reciprocal relationship for working with other local authorities.

Mr Lord replied that where homeless people have come from has been monitored carefully, particularly over the past three years. It has been found that most people do have a connection to the Salisbury Area. Inevitably, some people do come from outside the Salisbury area. Alabare would not turn someone away just because they did not have a connection with the Salisbury Area, but this would be subject to the space being available in the first place, and help being sought from more appropriate quarters.

Following the PowerPoint presentation from Mr Lord, the Head of Strategic Housing provided Members with a PowerPoint presentation on the work undertaken by the SHOOTS (Single Homeless, Opportunities, Options and Training and Support) project.

The Head of Strategic Housing explained that the project group comprised Salisbury District Council, Wiltshire County Council, Alabare, the Citizens Advice Bureau, John Baker House and the Primary Care Trust. The Portfolio Holder for Community and Housing also attended Project Group meetings.

Members stated that updates and information relating to the SHOOTS project should be provided to Members. The Head of Strategic Housing replied that a dedicated webpage to the SHOOTS work was proposed and this would include useful information and minutes of project group meetings.

Members asked if consideration had been given to the way in which Members could scrutinise this area of work to ensure that the SHOOTS project was really working.

The Head of Strategic Housing replied that Mark Bannan would be asked to come back to review what has happened in Salisbury following the publication of his report and the recommendations contained therein. Part of Mr Bannan's remit would be to scrutinise how the project has developed whilst also taking into account good practice at a national level.

Mr Lord suggested that Panel members may wish to consider coming to meet with residents at Damascus House to hear about their experiences directly.

Agreed – That Members of the future Community and Housing Panel be encouraged to pursue this matter, with a view to considering a further report on the SHOOTs project at a later date.

Members noted that the success of any project was not just dependent on expertise but funding also. Members requested an indication of funding for this project.

The Head of Strategic Housing replied that the SHOOTs Project Board did not hold any budgets itself. Mr Lord replied that funding for Alabare came from three main sources, (a) staffing – based on the supporting people initiative and the contract held with the Local Authority. This provided Alabare with the bulk of its revenue, equating approximately £700,000, (b) Rental Charges and (c) charitable donations. The District Council also helped fund the drop in centre.

The Head of Strategic Housing added that SHOOTs brought the key agencies together and this in turn provided enhanced service delivery.

Agreed – That the Chief Executive of Alabare and the Head of Strategic Housing be thanked for their most informative presentations.

241. Cabinet Forward Work Programme 2006/07

The Panel considered the previously circulated Cabinet Forward Work Programme, for those matters within the remit of the Panel.

Members noted that the Service Charge Review for Council Housing was due to be considered by the Cabinet at its June meeting and not April as previously indicated.

Members also noted that Andrew Reynolds was the relevant Unit Head of the report on the Disabled Facilities Grant Consultation and not Robin Townsend, Head of Community Initiatives, as previously indicated.

During the consideration of this item, Members asked if there had been any further developments in relation to the establishment of a Leisure Trust. The Portfolio Holder for Community and Housing replied that a countrywide partnership had been looked at in connection with the provision of leisure facilities. However, Wiltshire County Council had indicated that it did not favour this approach. As a result, further investigation was being undertaken to assess whether there was sufficient mass to achieve a leisure trust with neighbouring authorities.

Agreed –

- (1) That although the membership of the Community and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel was likely to alter following the District Council elections on 3rd May, Members indicated that they would like to see the information on the following Cabinet reports included on the agenda for the Panel meeting on 20th June:-
 - (a) Service Charge Review for Council Housing
 - (b) HRA Assets
 - (c) Full Planned Maintenance Programme
 - (d) Housing Management Unit Restructuring
- (2) That the Head of Housing Management be requested to consider the provision of training to new Members on housing issues as part of the Members Induction Programme following the May Elections.

242. Matters of Urgency

Although these matters were not on the previously circulated agenda, the Chairman declared that they be considered as matters of urgency since the next Panel meeting was not until June.

Noise Disturbance at Norfolk Road, Salisbury

Councillor Dalton informed Members that he had been contacted by residents of the Norfolk Road Sheltered Housing Scheme who were experiencing ongoing problems with dog noise (this started 18 months ago). The residents completed forms in order to record the dates and times when problems were experienced and submitted this to Environmental Health. Environmental Health returned these forms and

asked for others to be completed. Residents have expressed their dissatisfaction with the support they have received in connection with this matter to the Customer Services Unit. Councillor Dalton felt that no progress had been made in connection with this matter.

The Policy Director agreed to look into this matter.

Appointment of C&H Panel representative to the Guildhall Sub-Group (Salisbury Vision)

Further to the email, dated 9th February 2007, sent by the Principal Democratic Services Officer requesting nominations for one representative from the C&H Panel to sit on the Guildhall Sub-Group:-

Agreed – That Councillor Mrs Evans be appointed to the Guildhall Sub-Group

Meeting closed at 7.55pm
Members of the Public: 3