

Minutes

Meeting of : Community & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Panel
Meeting held in : The Almain Suite, City Hall, Salisbury
Date : Wednesday 26 November 2008
Commencing at : 6.00 pm

District Councillors:

Councillor M A Hewitt (Chairman)
Councillor B Rycroft (Vice Chairman)

Present:

Councillors R J Clewer, Mrs J A Green, C G Mills, C J Morrison, I M Mitchell and M Fowler (attending for agenda item 9)

Tenants Panel:

Mr Edwards, Mrs Jewell, Mr Watkins and Mr Southey

Present - Officers:

Graham Hogg (WCC Housing) and Jade Hibberd (Democratic Services)

Apologies:

Councillors R Britton and D J Luther

93. Public Questions / Statement Time:

There were none.

94. Councillor Questions/Statement Time:

There were none.

95. Minutes:

Resolved: that the minutes of the last ordinary meeting held on 1st October 2008 (previously circulated) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

96. Declarations of Interest:

There were none.



Awarded in:
Housing Services
Waste and Recycling Services



97. Chairman's Announcements:

The Chairman informed Members that he had received an invitation to attend a Sheltered Housing Working Group meeting and also requested that there be an item on Doctors surgeries at the next meeting.

98. Update on Housing Issues:

The committee received an update from Graham Hogg, Wiltshire County Councils Service Director for Housing on housing issues across the county. Mr Hogg responded to members questions on unitary related housing issues that had been forwarded to him from the last Community & Housing meeting;

1. What is the management structure?

Mr Hogg explained that there are six heads of services, and the appointment process has taken the tack that if a post already has a fitting counterpart it will be they who are appointed. The Allocations team will be part of Homes For Wiltshire, and the aim is that the new system will be up and running before unitary, the hope being the end of February. The Head of the Private Sector is being looked into, and this is being seen as an important asset with the possibility of the South team being based in Salisbury. Regarding new homes, there is an aim within the LAA that between now and 2011 that there will be an increase in output of affordable housing by 50% of figures prior to 2008, with a new team of strategic thinkers to implement this, but still with the aim of filling positions through job matches.

2. Where will all housing functions be based?

Mr Hogg explained there was no intension to move Housing Management and that it should stay in Salisbury at its current Endless Street location, and that there would also be no changes in Care Connects location. There is the aim to have one help line number that the public can call for any service, run by a centralised team at a location that is yet to be determined. Mr Hogg was also questioned on the issue of how smaller systems such as flood cottages would be integrated into this, to which he elaborated that a partnership of landlords would be established which would include big and small housing associations, to create one uniform policy and ensure the fairest outcome is achieved.

3. Is there a new Housing strategy?

Mr Hogg responded to members saying that no, a long-term strategy had not yet been established, with the focus currently being on having everything up and running within the unitary on day one of its beginning. There will not be a long-term strategy until 2010 due to more research is being needed.

4. Is there a short-term strategy?

Mr Hogg told members that important developments were happening within this and gave the example that by the end of 31st March 2010 the aim is that there will be no homelessness in the area.

5. & 8. What safeguards are in place for tenants? / What are his views about the future role and composition of the Tenants Panel? What does he see as the relationship between the Tenants Panel, any new local governance board and his department?

Mr Hogg reinforced to the committee that to have a distinct governance the involvement of independents may be necessary, and explained that but it was the role of himself and others to inform them of the merits of tenant participation, to ensure its continuation.

6. What energy saving initiatives do the council intend to implement?

Mr Hogg informed the committee that the bids for funding grants for energy measures aimed at those on low income had been successful, and that affordable housing will have to meet a higher energy efficient standard than normal houses.

7. & 10 Has the new Service Director endorsed Salisbury's HRA Business Plan – will it go to GOSW with his approval? / In the event of the government not making any changes to the HRA subsidy regime, will WC be willing to inject money into Salisbury's HRA in order (a) to avoid adverse effects on tenants in terms of service cuts; and (b) in order to rekindle aspirations to achieve the Salisbury Standard?

Mr Hogg told the committee that the HRA plan was due to go to Implementation Executive (I.E.) in January, and that a concern he had raised is that it did not add up, with a gap in the expenditure appearing later on, Mr Hogg stated that it would need to go to the I.E. with a proposal to plug this gap through capital investment or the selling of surplus land. The committee expressed their concern that if this situation was left without a solution the new council could possibly resort to stock transfer, and

precautions needed to be taken immediately.

9. What, if any, Housing department function does he see being established at Trowbridge?
Mr Hogg explained to the committee this was not yet known.

Resolved – that: the following recommendation be taken to the Implementation Executive;

It is recommended by the Community and Housing Scrutiny Panel that a shortfall in the Housing Revenue Account be anticipated and that officers, tenants and any input from relevant parties be used to explore all options that may be available to secure tenant standards of housing and current housing standards. Suggestions to start immediately, with a matter of urgency.

99. County Health Scrutiny:

The Panel received an overview of Wiltshire County Council's Health Scrutiny report from the Chairman.

Resolved – that this be noted

100. Housing Review Update:

The Panel received an update on housing issues in the district from Councillor Fowler whom sits on the Housing Group for the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Transition Board. Councillor Fowler explained that the Housing Task Group had met seven times now and a final report was due soon. He explained there had been reassurance that there will be very little change with the housing stock initially, and that the Tenants Panel are regarded as an important function and could receive further training. Members discussed measures which could be taken to further secure the Tenants Panels participation.

Resolved – that the following recommendation from the Community and Housing Scrutiny Panel be put to the next Housing Task Group;
The Community and Housing panel would request and support that a member of the Tenants Panel has a voting position on the area board on matters pertaining to housing issues.

101. Cabinet Forward Plan:

The Panel considered the previously circulated Cabinet Forward Plan.

Resolved – that the Chairman considers the need for a special meeting before the next Cabinet meeting for the consideration of the Cabinet papers.

*Meeting closed at: 19:43
Members of the Public: 0*