

# Community & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Panel

## Minutes

5.00pm, Tuesday 14 January 2003  
Committee Room 1, The Council House  
Salisbury

### Present

#### C & H Panel Members

Councillor P J Leo (Chairman)  
Councillor Mrs M I Evans (Vice Chairman)  
Councillor Mrs E A Chettleburgh  
(substituting for Councillor Bond)  
Councillor Mrs S L Dennis  
Councillor Miss F M P Howard  
Councillor M J Osment  
Councillor Mrs V M O'Sullivan  
Councillor P V H Paisey  
Councillor L Randall  
Councillor B M Rycroft  
Councillor Mrs O V Tanner  
Councillor Mrs I M Welsh

Councillor J M Cole-Morgan  
(Portfolio Holder, Community and Housing)

Councillor A G Peach  
(Deputy Portfolio Holder, Community and Housing)

### Tenants Panel

Councillor M J Hewitt  
Mr Curedon  
Mrs J Fazackerley

### Apologies

Councillor F D Bissington  
Mr A Hardiman  
Mr J Hinnis  
Mrs D Jewell

### In Attendance

Debbie Dixon (Policy Director)  
Arabella Davies (Democratic Services Officer)  
Kirsty Dudin (Tenant's Participation Officer)

### Other Officers in attendance

Rob Barclay (Head of Housing Services, Elderly & Vulnerable People)  
Derek Streek (Head of Housing Management)  
Lesley Waller (Head of Community Initiatives)  
Trevor Avery (Central Control Manager)  
Tony Beer (Best Value Special Projects Manager)  
Robin Townsend (Principal Leisure & Community Officer)

### Minutes

**79. PUBLIC QUESTION/STATEMENT TIME** – There were no public questions or statements.

**80. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** – That the minutes of the last ordinary meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2002 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

(Note: Minutes to include Councillor Mrs Green in the attendance list, as a representative from the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel and apologies from Councillor Mrs O’Sullivan)

**81. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** – There were no declarations of interest or whipping arrangements.

**82. DRAFT COMMUNITY & HOUSING PORTFOLIO PLAN 2003/04 AND CORPORATE PLANNING BUDGET UPDATE**

The Panel considered the attached draft Community and Housing Portfolio Plan for 2003/2004 and the report from the Leader of the Council, together with the extract minute of the Cabinet meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> December, all previously circulated.

The Policy Director explained the Corporate Planning and Budget cycle as follows:-

- ❖ April – The cycle commences with the programme of work for the year ahead for each Portfolio.
- ❖ December – the draft Portfolio Plan for each area is prepared.
- ❖ January – Each scrutiny panel considers their own draft Portfolio Plan.
- ❖ February – The Portfolio Plans are finalised at the Full Council Meeting, where Council Tax is also set.
- ❖ The Officers then put the plans in place.

The Portfolio Holder highlighted the key elements of the draft Community and Housing Portfolio Plan 2003/04 as follows:-

Context

Three out of five of the Council’s main political priorities fall within the Community & Housing Portfolio Plan:-

- (a) Affordable Housing
- (b) Housing Stock Improvement Plan
- (c) Customer Services

The draft plan makes a significant contribution to delivering the Council’s vision for the district and represents a major contribution in helping the Council achieve its ambition to be a leading District Council through the high performance of services.

Review

**1. Improving Service Quality at minimum cost**

Three best value reviews have been undertaken within the remit of this portfolio:-

- Leisure Facilities
- Community Safety
- Housing Repairs

## **2. Housing Stock Improvement Plan**

A one year programme has been compiled to improve kitchens, bathrooms and external doors.

Future planned maintenance programmes will follow a similar pattern but with Decent Homes Standards work taking priority.

## **3. Affordable Housing**

Three large pieces of work have brought greater clarity and focus to enabling and delivering affordable housing

- Housing needs and stock condition survey
- Housing Strategy for 2003-2007
- Scrutiny Review "Creating More Affordable Homes in South Wiltshire.

## **4. Tackling Disadvantage**

This has been addressed through the following measures:-

- WISECARD – with has over 500 members
- Salisbury Housing Support Service
- Race Equality Policy and action plan for Housing
- Affordable Warmth Strategy
- Exercise programmes for vulnerable people
- £1.7million funding for Healthy Living Centre e.g. medical referrals to Sports Centres
- Targeting Crime Hotspots

## **5. Performance**

Nationally, the Council is in the top 25% of Local Authorities for completing repairs and tenant satisfaction with repairs. But the Council needs to improve on turning around benefits and its work to support homeless people.

### Key Factors Affecting the Portfolio Plan

#### **1. Legislation**

- ❑ Loss of Housing Capital Receipts
- ❑ Homelessness (currently 50 families are in Bed and Breakfast Accommodation)
- ❑ Changes to Benefits – Housing Element and Support Element

#### **2. National Factors**

- ❑ Decent Homes Standard
- ❑ Comprehensive Performance Assessment
- ❑ Rent Restructuring
- ❑ 797 more affordable homes are needed per year for the next five years

### 3. Local Factors

- ❑ Pressures on housing finance through loss of capital receipts and rent restructuring
- ❑ Demand significantly outstrips supply in terms of grants to community groups and housing associations.
- ❑ Fear of Crime – even though Salisbury District is a low crime area
- ❑ Pressure on house prices

#### Risk Assessment

- Insufficient funding to meet growing need for housing stock maintenance and grant funding to local community groups
- Demand for social housing, given high house prices, low wages and limited funding for grant aiding building of new homes by the Housing Association.
- Introduction of new Government benefits, which affect other benefits, paid by SDC.

#### Resources

Budget Strategy:-

(a) Services have been prioritised into four areas and expenditure targeted on political priorities:-

- ❖ Housing and benefits = a top priority, so no budget cut
- ❖ Community Initiatives – 1% cut
- ❖ Sports Centres – 1.4%
- ❖ Community Grants, Sports Development, Arts and Entertainment, markets and fairs – 1.8%

(b) Increase in fees and charges – but ensure that WISECARD continues to support those on low incomes

(c) Pursue Charitable Trust Status for leisure facilities to realise savings (up to £300,000 pa)

(d) Review Merger of CCTV and Housing Control Centre

#### Action Plan for 2003/2004

The action plan for the Community and Housing Portfolio Plan 2003/2004 will be determined from existing tasks already approved by the Council from the following strategies and plans:-

Arts Policy

Affordable Housing Scrutiny

Best Value Review of Elderly and Vulnerable People

Community Plans

Community Safety Strategy

Cultural Strategy

Equality Policy

HRA Business Plan

Housing Strategy  
Social Inclusion Policy  
Sport and Recreation Strategy

The Portfolio Holder went on to explain that a cut of 1.8% was required from the Arts Budget. This represented £26,000, an amount that was not easy to find. The Portfolio Holder outlined his proposal as to how this saving could be met - £23,000 from the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum and £3,000 from the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. He added that it would be better to take large sums of money from these two budgets, rather than take small amounts from the budgets of all the Arts Organisations funded by Salisbury District Council. The Portfolio Holder emphasised that these proposed cuts were for one year only and would not set a precedent for future years.

**It was agreed that the following comments be sent to the Cabinet:-**

Whilst not celebrating the need to make savings, the approach put forward by the Portfolio Holder, that preserves essential services through focussed reductions for 2003-2004, is supported by the Community and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Further to the above comments, the Panel also made the following comments:-

Members were concerned that if Charitable Status was pursued e.g. for Leisure Centres in Salisbury District, this could realise large savings, but not to the benefit of the services concerned. Currently, savings realised by managers are ploughed back into central funds.

Members agreed that some incentive for Managers to make savings needed to be introduced. This issue would need to be agreed corporately, so that some savings could be redirected into the service where the saving was first made and some savings back into the Corporate Budget.

**AGREED** – That this matter be given further consideration at a future meeting of the Community & Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Members noted that proposed increases in fees and charges, especially for swimming pools in Salisbury District could result in a decline in usage, particularly since the trend for swimming is diminishing anyway.

**AGREED** – The Panel would like to be kept informed of the impact of increased fees and charges on usage figures.

The meeting closed at 6.55 p.m.