

# Community & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Panel

## Minutes

6.00pm, Tuesday 11 March 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 D Bond  
Councillor M J Hewitt  
(substituting for P V H Paisey)  
Councillor Miss F M P Howard  
Councillor J E Jeans  
Councillor M J Osment  
Councillor Mrs V M O'Sullivan  
Councillor L Randall  
Councillor B M Rycroft  
Councillor Mrs O V Tanner  
Councillor Mrs I M Welsh

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

### In Attendance

Debbie Dixon (Policy Director)  
Arabella Davies (Democratic Services Officer)  
Kirsty Dudin (Tenant's Participation Officer)  
Robin Townsend (Principal Leisure & Community Officer)  
Lesley Waller (Head of Community Initiatives)

### Apologies

Councillor Mrs S L Dennis

### Tenants Panel

Councillor F D Bissington, Mr A Hardiman, Mr J Hinnis, Mrs D Jewell, Mr A Southey and Mr Watkins

### Apologies

Mrs J Fazackerley

### Minutes

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

**90. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** – That the minutes of the last ordinary meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2003 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

**92. MAXIMISING EXTERNAL FUNDING TO MEET THE COUNCIL AND COMMUNITY'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

The Chairman informed the Panel that he had worked together with Councillor Paisey on the above review and he went on to set out the key findings, making reference to the report of the Principal Leisure and Community Officer (circulated under cover of letter dated 7<sup>th</sup> March).

The Chairman explained that it was difficult to obtain any benchmarking data on which to judge the Council's overall performance in relation to obtaining external funding. For the purpose of this review, the only data that the project team had been able to use to compare Salisbury District

Council's performance against other local authorities related specifically to statistics obtained from the National Lottery. On the basis of this statistical data, the conclusions drawn suggested that Salisbury District Council appeared to receive as much external funding as was reasonable to expect, given that it often failed to meet external funding grant criteria, notably, Salisbury does not rank highly on the scales of deprivation.

The second key finding of the review was that a more strategic and coordinated approach to securing external funding appeared to be the best way forward. The project team interviewed Officers from three other local authorities that have specialist officers working on external funding; Wiltshire County Council, Kent County Council and Dorset County Council.

Each Authority had contrasting approaches, Kent for example had a senior bidding officer responsible for achieving funding from various sources including co-ordinating S106 agreements with major developments. Wiltshire had recently established a similar strategic post including a fund to 'pump prime' projects. The Officer at Dorset was not a strategic officer and worked on a demand basis, responding to adhoc requests for help with funding.

In light of this research, the closure of the Funding Advice Service at the Salisbury & District Council for Voluntary Service and the new Customer Services Team at the District Council, the Project Team has recommended that an External Funding Officer working at a strategic level be employed.

#### **RESOLVED –**

- (1) That Councillors Leo and Paisey, together with the officers be thanked for their work on this scrutiny review.
- (2) That Alan Osborne of Financial Services be requested to approach the Area Committees with a view to speaking on the Grantfinder Database. This database can be used to advise applicants on different grants available for specific projects.

#### **RECOMMENDATION TO MANAGEMENT TEAM**

That the Management Team investigate establishing the post of 'Corporate External Funding Officer' under a fixed term contract funded by the additional revenue that such a post can be expected to secure. The positions established by Kent and Wiltshire County Council should be used as a model, adapted for the smaller size of authority and for working within the Strategic Alliance.

### **93. REVIEW OF THE WORK OF THE COMMUNITY AND HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL 2002-2003**

The Policy Director informed Members that she had received a copy of the District Auditors report, which included a review of the new political structure at Salisbury District Council, focussing on Cabinet and Scrutiny Panels. The review held up the Community and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel as an example of good practice, citing the following – the panel was well run, focussed and succinct and excellent chairing skills had been demonstrated. The Panel had worked well, extending invitations to external organisations to attend meetings and referring to wider work programmes. Members had demonstrated good questioning and debate and there was wide public engagement, together with support from officers and good examples of cross party working. It was highly likely that the Panel would be used an example of good practice by District Audit at a national level.

Members went on to consider the work undertaken by the Panel over the past year, identifying those areas that had worked well and those areas that could be done differently. The conclusions of the Panel are set out below:-

<b>Policy Development / In Depth Investigations</b>	
<b>Activities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating More Affordable Homes</li> <li>• Improving the Council's Contribution to tackling anti social behaviour</li> <li>• Maximising External Funding</li> <li>• Developing the Housing Strategy</li> <li>• Undertaking the Stock Options Appraisal</li> </ul>	
<b>What worked well</b>	<b>What needs to be done differently</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ External visits, both to best practice authorities and 'not so good' authorities</li> <li>❑ Acting as a panel and not as a committee</li> <li>❑ No whipping arrangements</li> <li>❑ The opportunity to learn about particular subjects</li> <li>❑ Co-operative role with Cabinet and Portfolio Holder</li> <li>❑ Visitors to SDC</li> <li>❑ The Panel has worked flexibly and appropriately for each piece of work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ There should be update reports on whether a difference has been made as a result of scrutiny work</li> <li>❑ It can be difficult for members to be engaged in the scrutiny process if they are at work and the Panel meets or undertakes scrutiny work e.g. external site visits during the day. There should be opportunities for these members to become involved in different ways.</li> <li>❑ More flexibility about when scrutiny working groups meet</li> <li>❑ Working Groups should sort out in advance how they intend to work and delegate tasks within the group according to members commitments</li> <li>❑ Less condensed scrutiny activities</li> </ul>

<b>Holding the Cabinet to Account</b>
<b>Activities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre Cabinet review of key policies e.g. Planned Maintenance Programme 2002/2003</li> <li>• Call In e.g. Top Slicing SWAG</li> <li>• Calling the Portfolio Holder as a witness e.g. Portfolio Plan</li> </ul>
<b>What needs to be done differently</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Avoid considering reports that do not really need to be considered by the Panel</li> <li>❑ Devise an easy guide to the Call-In Procedure</li> <li>❑ Adopt a consultative approach when dealing with external people e.g. experts and Portfolio Holder (Terminology such as "Witness" may appear a bit heavy handed especially when asking external people for their advice, knowledge and expertise)</li> </ul>

<b>Best Value Reviews</b>	
<b>Activities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leisure Facilities</li> <li>• Services to older and vulnerable people</li> </ul>	
<b>What worked well</b>	<b>What needs to be done differently</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ The Review on Leisure Facilities engaged the general public</li> <li>❑ By encouraging people to think the “unthinkable” more possibilities could be explored</li> <li>❑ The Review on older and vulnerable people worked well since it focussed on individual groups for feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Are Best Value Reviews really worth the effort? Scrutiny Panels undertake the work, identify issues and possible solutions and these in turn are “cherry picked” by the Cabinet.</li> </ul> <p>For example as a result of the BVR on Leisure Facilities, 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.</p>

The meeting closed at 7.20 p.m.