

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL  
NOTES OF A MEETING OF HOUSING SCRUTINY STANDING PANEL  
HELD ON TUESDAY, 18 MARCH 2008  
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING  
AT 5.30 - 7.03 PM**

**Members Present:** Mrs R Gadsby (Chairman), , K Chana, Mrs J Lea, Mrs P Richardson, Mrs P K Rush, J Wyatt and Mrs M Carter (Epping Forest Tenants and Leasholders Federation)

**Other members present:** D Stallan

**Apologies for Absence:** S Murray, Mrs H Harding and Mrs L Wagland

**Officers Present** A Hall (Director of Housing), R Wilson (Assistant Head of Housing Services (Operations)), P Maddock (Assistant Head of Finance), H Thorpe (Housing Assets Manager) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

**Also in attendance:**

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**23. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

With the agreement of the Panel, Councillor Mrs Rush was appointed Vice Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

**24. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)**

The Panel noted that there were no substitute members.

**25. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

The Panel noted that there were no declarations of interest.

**26. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME**

The Terms of Reference and the Work Programme were noted.

It was noted that:

- a report was to be prepared on item 3 of the work programme on the progress on meeting PSA7 target on Decent Homes for a future meeting; and
- a report on item 17, the Review of Careline Services has been drafted and is to be brought to the next meeting of this Panel following consultation with ECC, staff and UNISON.

**27. UNAUTHORISED PARKING ON HOUSING ESTATES**

The meeting received a report from the Assistant Head of Housing Services on Unauthorised Parking on Housing Estates. The Housing Portfolio Holder has identified problems with parking and increased congestion on Housing Estates and

recommended to the Cabinet at their meeting on 10 March 2008 that the Housing Scrutiny Panel review the options available to the Council on issues of parking enforcement and the option of increasing the budget for the off-street parking programme.

Many of the Housing Estates were built during the late 1940s and 1950s. With the subsequent growth in car ownership, residents are experiencing severe parking problems on estates where parking both on and off road is at a premium. In addition, due to the introduction of permit parking, many side roads are becoming further congested (possibly by commuters) particularly in the Debden and Epping areas with vehicles being forced onto grassed verges.

Complaints received by Housing from the public are very much on the increase. The complaints are about two main issues. Firstly, residents are unhappy that more vehicles are being parked on grass verges causing damage to the open green spaces, which are costly to repair and can be dangerous to pedestrians and children playing. When, in response, enforcement action is taken by the Council, in the form of installing bollards, jockey rails or shrub planting, other residents complain about having nowhere to park with cars being displaced into already heavily congested side streets. Secondly, residents complain about the lack of off-street parking and put forward suggestions for schemes that could be constructed where they live.

The Council is currently undertaking consultation exercises on a number of off-street parking schemes, which have been given priority under the agreed scoring system.

The budget for off-street parking for 2008/2009 is £288,000 which includes amounts carried forward from previous years. Of this amount £161,000 is Housing Revenue Account (HRA) funding with £127,000 general fund. There is currently budget provision of £80,000 per annum in future years, £43,000 funded from the HRA and £37,000 from the general fund. As off-street parking schemes are very costly, it is anticipated that this year's budget will only fund around three schemes depending upon the costs of designs and re-locating any utilities.

The Panel was asked to consider three main issues surrounding this topic. They were:

- (i) Should the Council take enforcement action and force residents to park elsewhere increasing congestion in side streets;
- (ii) Should the Council consider spending more on off street parking schemes, bearing in mind an additional £300,000 will be available in the HRA from 2009/10, which, if spent on off-street parking would need to be match funded from the General Funds Capital Programme;
- (iii) Under the Council's current policy, the maximum permitted amount of grass verge to be removed in order to construct a vehicular crossover to allow residents to park their vehicles in their front garden is 6 metres in length. Should the 6 metre rule be extended, to enable up to two vehicles to be parked off-road (although this would remove one vehicle space on the street).

The Tenants and Leaseholder's Federation were consulted at their meeting of 13 March 2008. They thought that all £300,000 should be spent on the parking scheme and the 6 metre rule relaxed, and the use of grass crete be considered to be used on all cross-overs (grass crete is a mesh that can be put over existing grass and that looks like grass from a distance). They also felt that action should be taken to prevent parking on green swards.

The Panel considered the alternative of putting in lay-bys for parking, although this would be more of an off-street parking scheme than a cross-over, and would be much more expensive to carry out this type of work. They also considered permit parking, but this was considered costly (employing someone to check up on cars with or without permits and the issuing and collections of fines etc.). Also there is such a scheme on the Broadway, but people are not buying the permits and so are leaving empty spaces, forcing people to park in side streets and forcing residents to park on the grass verges.

Asked to elaborate on the amount of money available, the Assistant Head of Finance said that there was £288,000 in next year's budget and £300,000 per year thereafter for four years. The general fund must contribute a similar amount making a total of around £2.4 million over the four year period. The Cabinet will have to agree the levels of expenditure from the HRA and General Fund.

Regarding the 6 metre rule, the Assistant Head of Housing said that in order to have any impact it would need to increase to 12 metres. The Panel were assured that residents would not be allowed to park on the crossover as the vehicles would pose hazards, would be unsightly and would stop children playing games etc.

The Panel were of the view that any policy should be consistent across the district.

As it was a District wide problem it was thought that maybe all members should be consulted and their views taken into account. The Housing Portfolio Holder suggested that an item be placed in the Members Bulletin seeking the views of all members. These views could then be brought back to the next Housing Scrutiny Panel meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

The initial view of the Housing Scrutiny Panel is:

- (1) That a report be put into the Members Bulletin outlining the background and asking members views, with a further report being submitted to the next Housing Scrutiny panel meeting.
- (2) That enforcement action be put on hold pending a decision.
- (3) That the current budget of £288,000 for next year and £300,000 per year from 2009/10 onwards for four years, be set aside for off street parking schemes subject to General Fund match funding.
- (4) That the 6 metre rule be extended to 12 meters.

**28. HRA BUSINESS PLAN 2008/09**

The Director of Housing introduced the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan for 2008/09. The Panel noted that it was a requirement of the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) that all local authorities produce annual Business Plans for their Housing Revenue Accounts (HRAs). The DCLG intention was to ensure that local authority housing is used and maintained to maximum effect. The HRA Business Plan deals with the Council's plans and performance for the delivery and quality of its housing services to tenants.

In past years, the Business Plan had been produced around April and had updated statistical information relating to the previous financial year. However, this had not been possible this year, since the Council's new Audit and Governance Committee had required that all the Council's Business Plans are completed and published by 31 March - before the end of the financial year. Therefore, all the statistics and

information relates to 2006/7, which is the last year that full year statistics are available.

Comments on the Business Plan from the Tenants and Leaseholder's Federation were tabled at the meeting. They were generally pleased with the format of the Plan and with the fact that once again the Housing Directorate had been awarded the Chartermark for Customer Service Excellence. They were pleased that the Council was on target to meet the Decent Homes Standard by 2010 and recognised from the financial plan that programmes of work are focused on this target.

The Panel then went through the report section by section. They noted that:

- On page 23, item 11 'Setting Tenant's Rents', that the third paragraph referred to  $\frac{3}{4}$  and  $\frac{1}{3}$  it should have been  $\frac{3}{4}$  and  $\frac{1}{4}$ .
- On page 27, the Director of Housing advised that the views of the Tenants and Leaseholder's Federation needed updating.
- Page 77 refers to 10 Portfolio Holders, there are now only 8.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2008/09 incorporating the Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan 2008/09 be recommended to the Housing Portfolio Holder for adoption.

**29. TENANT PARTICIPATION PROGRESS REPORT 2007**

The Panel considered the Tenants Participation Progress Report 2007. They noted that over the last 10 to 12 years a complex network of tenant participation had evolved. At the top of this network sits the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Association, where the council seeks the views of from their tenants on every major policy issue.

Each of the residents groups has signed a Local Tenant Participation Agreement with the Council, which sets out the approach each group and the Council will adopt in relation to tenant participation. These agreements are renewed on a yearly basis.

In its Key Lines of Enquiry the Government had identified a number of 'hard to reach groups'; rural communities, younger people, minority groups and families; that landlords are expected to include in the tenant participation process. The Tenant Participation Officer has been working with a number of these groups in a variety of ways.

The Tenant Participation Officer holds monthly progress meetings with the Housing Resources Manager and Principal Housing Officer (Information and Strategy) and quarterly progress meetings with the Assistant Director of Housing (Operations).

The Tenant Participation Officer maintains an Action Plan which monitors progress of all aspects of tenant participation. Progress of the Action Plan is discussed at both the monthly and quarterly meetings.

This type of consultation is proving to be very useful to the Council and they are very proud of it.

**RESOLVED:**

That the progress made on the implementation of Tenant Participation during the period 1 January 2007 and 31 December 2007 be noted.

**30. REPORTS TO BE MADE TO THE NEXT MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The Chairman agreed to report briefly to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee all the reports considered at this meeting.

**31. FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Panel noted that this was the last meeting for this municipal year.