

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF HOUSING SCRUTINY STANDING PANEL
HELD ON THURSDAY, 9 OCTOBER 2008
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 5.30 - 7.00 PM**

Members Present:	S Murray (Chairman), Mrs R Brookes, D Dodeja, R Frankel, Mrs J Lea, Mrs P Richardson and J Wyatt
Other members present:	Mrs C Pond, B Rolfe and D Stallan
Apologies for Absence:	Mrs R Gadsby, D Bateman, Mrs L Wagland and Mrs J H Whitehouse
Officers Present	R Wilson (Assistant Director Operations (Housing)) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)
Also in attendance:	Mrs M Carter (Epping Forest Tenants and Leasholders Federation)

13. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

With the agreement of the Panel, Councillor J Wyatt was appointed Vice Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That, Councillor J Wyatt be appointed Vice Chairman for the meeting.

14. SUBSITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

Noted that Councillor R Frankel was attending the meeting as a substitute for Councillor Mrs J Whitehouse.

15. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 3 JULY 2008

The minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel from 18 March 2008 had not been agreed and were tabled at this meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That, the minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel of 18 March 2008 be agreed; and
- (b) That, the minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel of 3 July 2008 be agreed, subject to the substitution of the words "the 6 metre rule should be doubled," for "the 6 metre rule should not be doubled," in paragraph 8 of minute 8.

16. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations made pursuant to the Member's Code of Conduct.

17. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

This item was noted.

18. PARKING ENFORCEMENT ON HOUSING ESTATES

The Assistant Director of Housing Services, presented a report to the Panel regarding Parking Enforcement on Housing Estates.

At its last meeting in July 2008, the Housing Scrutiny Panel considered a report on options to resolve the problems with parking and congestion on housing estates. The Housing Portfolio Holder and the Panel had agreed that the following recommendations should be made to the Cabinet at its September 2008 meeting.

(1) That the maximum amount of grassed verge to be removed in order to construct a vehicular crossover to allow residents to park their vehicles in their front garden be increased from 6 metres to 12 metres in length; and

(2) That the additional £300,000 budget available in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Programme from 2009/2010 be made available to fund further off-street parking schemes match funded from the General Fund.

It had further been agreed that where any vehicular crossover had removed between 6 and 12 metres of grass verge in length, ward members should be consulted as well as neighbours.

The Panel had also considered the increase in complaints from the public about unauthorised parking. The complaints were from residents unhappy that more vehicles were being parked on grass verges causing damage to the open green spaces. In response, when enforcement action was taken by the Council, other residents had complained about having nowhere to park with cars being displaced into already heavily congested side streets. There had been mixed responses from elected members, some had asked that action be taken to prevent vehicles from parking on the grassed verges, while other members had asked officers not to take action as it displaced vehicles and caused problems inside streets.

A policy had been drafted on the recommendation of officers, on the approach to be taken on unauthorised parking. The draft had been attached to the agenda.

The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation were consulted on the report at their meeting in September 2008. Their comments were as follows:

(a) Any policy could prove to be inconsistent and costly should any car owners be taken to court for continually parking on grassed verges without permission; and

(b) More clarification should be given within the policy on matters relating to safety, including sight lines, etc; and

(c) Parking on grass verges should not be allowed where damage could be caused to underground utilities; and

(d) Consideration could be given to parking permits.

Although the above comments on the policy had been put forward the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, by a majority of 5 to 2, had concluded that unauthorised

parking on housing-owned grass verges, should generally not be permitted across the district.

The two Area Housing Managers responsible for housing management in the north and south of the district had been consulted on the draft enforcement policy. They had asked that the Panel consider their concerns which were:

- (i) Any enforcement policy would be difficult to apply, as it was always going to be unclear and difficult to interpret; and
- (ii) An enforcement policy would likely be subjective in its application and difficult decisions would need to be made, which with the current arrangement, some would be in favour of and others against; and
- (iii) When a decision was made, the Council may have difficulty explaining to residents why it was allowed in one area and not another; and
- (iv) We would not allow cars to cause an obstruction, or damage grass verges in the winter which would result in high cost re-instatement work. Installing "grasscrete" on areas where enforcement action was not taken may not be the answer, as it implied that parking was encouraged.

Councillor R Frankel suggested to the Panel that the best scheme for parking enforcement was for the District Council to sell parking licenses, the scheme would be self funding and could possibly be £100.00per annum per licensee. However, members were sceptical about this proposal, as it would be an extra financial cost to residents. This would be expensive and time consuming.

It was suggested that persistent parking offenders could be forced to pay for any damage they had caused. Mr R Wilson reminded the Panel that lorries or commercial vehicles were not allowed to park in housing estates, the tenancy agreements stipulated that this was prohibited. Councillor J Wyatt suggested that pavement parking should be prohibited except where an exemption was made. A sign could be attached to a lamp post to signify that pavement parking was allowed.

Councillor Mrs C Pond suggested adding more points to the draft policy, these were:

- Paragraph 2 after "residents in the area are unable to park within the immediate vicinity of their home", add within a five minute walk.
- Paragraph 3 add "When one or more can apply."
- Bullet point 1, under paragraph 3, replace "particular important amenity value," with "common sense."
- Extra bullet point – "Other than clamping."

These amendments were agreed at the meeting.

Some members were in favour of a voucher scheme for visitors or writing to households with more than one car concerning a change in policy. The Assistant Director of Housing, Mr R Wilson, advised the Panel that any voucher or letter notification of residents should not overlook the potential cost. There were only two Housing Management Officers responsible for between 700-800 properties each

within the district. They had tasks to perform such as dealing with rent arrears. They only spent 10% of their time on enforcement. Any extra work would need more staff which in turn would require Cabinet approval.

Councillor Mrs J Lea thought that pro-active Councillors reporting parking problems more frequently would help facilitate better enforcement. The Chairman said that there was not the staff currently available for enforcement and it was unlikely that the Cabinet would agree to extra staff. Problem areas needed to be identified.

The Housing Portfolio Holder, Councillor D Stallan expressed his gratitude to the Panel and the Tenants and Leaseholder's Federation for their comments. He felt there was a need for a clearly defined policy. He was against a license system for residents saying it would impose an extra burden on top of their household costs. He felt that the main parking problems in the District were around places like Debden which had lots of commuters parking there. He stated that the Cabinet would not employ extra staff to cover enforcement. He was in favour of a trial period in one area for a year, residents should be forewarned beforehand.

The Chairman advised that information could be put in The Forester and the Housing News for residents as to where enforcement action is being taken. Councillor D Stallan was unsure about publication deadlines for The Forester and the Housing News, and how this would tie in with a future Cabinet report. However the Chairman requested that a trial period should be initiated, it would not change any previous actions taken by officers.

RESOLVED:

That the Parking Enforcement on Housing Estates draft policy be recommended to the Housing Portfolio Holder for Cabinet approval, with the amendments as stated in the above text.

19. ALLOCATION SCHEME REPORT 2008

The Assistant Director of Housing, Mr R Wilson, presented a report for Cabinet approval to the Panel for comment. It concerned a Review of the Allocations Scheme 2008.

The Review of the Allocations Scheme was legally required for the Council. It set out the procedures for allocating its housing accommodation and making nominations to Registered Social Landlords. Each year the Cabinet considered the Council's Allocations Scheme and reviewed changes following detailed consideration by this Panel. Mr R Wilson briefly outlined the amendments to the Panel.

There was a tabled amendment to Appendix One regarding Band One (c) of the Housing Allocations Scheme which concerned homeless applications. If no successful expressions of interest had been made by a homeseeker, the Council would then express an interest in a maximum of three suitable properties for a further 4 weeks (two cycles) on behalf of the homeseeker, if the homeseeker was still unsuccessful then the Council would make one offer of suitable, secure accommodation.

This amendment had been designed to deter some homeless applicants from not expressing an interest in suitable properties during the 8 week (4 cycles) period and waiting for a direct offer of a house. This additional period proposed would ensure that homeless applicants were prioritised along with other homeseekers, allowing

them to compete for the more desirable properties which would ensure a fairer process.

RESOLVED:

That, the Housing Allocations Scheme, with tabled amendments, be recommended to the Cabinet.

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

It was reported that there were no reports going to the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

21. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meetings of the Panel were noted as follows:

8 January 2009; and
26 March 2009