

STANDING PANELS

1. HOUSING SCRUTINY STANDING PANEL

The Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel consisted of the following members:

Councillor S Murray (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs R Gadsby (Vice Chairman)
Councillors R Barrett, D Dodeja, Mrs A Grigg, Ms J Hart, Ms J Hedges, Mrs S Jones, Mrs J Lea, L Leonard, A Lion and Mrs J Whitehouse.

The Lead Officer was Alan Hall, Director of Housing. The Panel also appreciated the Housing Portfolio Holder, Councillor D Stallan, attending the meetings to help them with their deliberations.

Mrs Molly Carter, the Chairman of the Tenants and Leaseholder Federation, who attends the meetings as a non-voting co-opted member to provide the views of residents and stakeholders, also took part in Panel discussions.

Terms of Reference

The Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel is tasked to undertake reviews of a number of the Council's public and private sector housing policies and to make recommendations arising from such reviews to the Housing Portfolio Holder, Overview and Scrutiny Committee or Cabinet as appropriate. They also undertake specific projects related to public and private sector housing issues, as directed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Panel scrutinised a number of important issues over the last year, which included:

(i) **Homeless Prevention Service** – the Panel received a presentation from the Housing Options Manager on the District Council's Homelessness Prevention Service, which became fully operational in 2006, forming an integral part of Housing options. This service has so far reduced demand on costly temporary accommodation, reduced unnecessary homeless applications and provided effective Housing options for households with housing difficulties.

(ii) **Tenant Satisfaction Survey** – they received a report on the Tenant Satisfaction Survey - in comparison with other stock retaining councils. They noted that the Tenant Support Survey was no longer required by government and consideration was being given to whether or not the council should continue to carry out such surveys voluntarily. A recent comparison of the 2008 survey result found that our District Council was in the top 10% nationally.

(iii) **Review of Proposed New Licence Conditions for Permanent Residential Park Homes Sites** – In September 2010 they held a special public meeting devoted to a review of proposed licence conditions for permanent Residential Park Homes. In 2008 the government produced new standards for permanent residential mobile home sites (Model Standards 2008 for Caravan Sites) which provided a framework upon which councils could base conditions on for re-licensing sites. A report went to

Cabinet, but two aspects of the decision was called in for review. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the call-in and referred the two issues back to the Cabinet for further consideration. They asked the Housing Scrutiny Panel to undertake a detailed review of all the proposals and report back to the Cabinet. The two issues specifically raised were i) that insufficient consultation had been undertaken with residents and members and ii) that insufficient consideration had been given to the impact on the privacy of residents by requesting the lowering of hedges and fences to one metre and requesting existing hedges/fences to remain at two metres.

The Panel received several public representations at this meeting and also received background information and comments from Fire Officers. The Panel engaged in a long debate, taking into account the public's comments, on the merits of the new model standards and made several recommendations to the Cabinet about what should be included in the new site licences.

This would hopefully take the public's concerns on board while enabling the council to discharge its responsibilities for licensing such sites.

(iv) New National Housing Policies- they received a presentation on the new National Housing Policies and Legislation. This proposed new legislation would have significant effect on the Council, its tenants and housing applicants. These draft proposals are due to come into effect next April (2012).

(v) Housing Service Standards and Schemes – the Panel agreed or commented on a range of Housing Service Standards and schemes covering all of the Housing Directorate's main areas of activity. These included the Housing Strategy, Housing Standards (2010), the Housing Charter, Housing Service Strategy on the Private Rented Sector, a review of the Housing Key Performance Indicators, the Housing Customer Perspective Programme – Final Action Plan, the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan, the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2010/11 (six month progress report), the Housing Service Strategy on Anti-social Behaviour and a consultation paper on 'Local Decisions - A fairer Future for Social Housing'.

Case Study: Review of Proposed New Licence Conditions for Permanent Residential Park Home Sites

The Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel's major piece of work this year was the Review of Proposed New Licence Conditions for Permanent Residential Park Home Sites.

The review had come about because in April 2008, the Government produced new standards for permanent residential mobile home sites, these provided a framework upon which councils could base the conditions they attach when re-licensing sites. In June 2010 the Housing Portfolio Holder presented a report to the Cabinet on proposed new licence conditions for all new and existing permanent residential park home sites within the District. However, two aspects of the decision were called-in by five Council members for Overview and Scrutiny review. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its July 2010 meeting referred the matter to the Housing Services Scrutiny Standing Panel with a view to making recommendations to the Cabinet.

The Panel met on 8 September 2010 for an extra-ordinary meeting. Following lengthy discussion involving two invited senior Fire Service officers, the Panel recommended that certain licence conditions be excluded from the site licences for park home sites that comprised only one park home, that all residents and site owners would be consulted on both the licence conditions proposed by the Cabinet and the Panel's recommendations, and that the results of the consultation be reported to the Cabinet.