

Report to the Housing Scrutiny Panel

Date of meeting: 7 December 2005

Portfolio: Housing – Cllr M. Heavens

Subject: Witness Protection Mobility Scheme

Officer contact for further information: Alan Hall, Head of Housing Services (ext 4004)

Committee Secretary: Zoe Folley (ext 4532)



Recommendations:

- 1) That the Scrutiny Panel considers, and makes a recommendation to the Housing Portfolio Holder, on whether or not the Council should accept occasional requests for Council accommodation to applicants referred by the Home Office's Witness Protection Mobility Scheme; and**
- 2) That, if it is recommended that occasional requests should be accepted, it be further recommended to the Housing Portfolio Holder that;**
 - a) No more than one property be offered to applicants on the Witness Protection Mobility Scheme within any 12 month period;**
 - b) Only flats or maisonettes be offered, not houses;**
 - c) Only accommodation with no more than two bedrooms be offered;**
 - d) The Head of Housing Services must be satisfied that the applicant is unlikely to cause, or be the cause, of any anti-social behaviour; and**
 - e) The Housing Allocations Scheme be amended accordingly, with effect from 1 April 2006.**

Report

1. From time to time, the Council receives requests for assistance from the Home Office's Witness Protection Mobility Scheme. The Scheme has been set up to assist important witnesses to public prosecutions to relocate, and to often take on new identities, in order to avoid any repercussions from them giving evidence at trials.
2. When requests are received, the Council is only provided with a brief, sanitised explanation of the case, including details of the household composition and need. In nearly all cases, for obvious reasons, the applicants live outside the District.
3. The scheme is not statutory and, to date, no requests for assistance have been accepted by the Head of Housing Services due to the high housing need within the District. However, in view of the relative regularity of requests now being received (around three or four per year), it is felt that a formal policy decision on this issue needs to be made. The Housing Portfolio Holder has therefore asked the Scrutiny Panel to consider whether or not it feels the Council should accept occasional referrals from the Scheme and, if so, on what terms.
4. In considering whether or not the Council should accept some requests for assistance, the Scrutiny Panel clearly needs to balance the high housing needs of residents within the District with its wider responsibility to assist with crime reduction.

5. If it is felt that the Council should accept occasional requests, it is suggested that it be subject to the following:

- a) No more than one property be offered to applicants on the Witness Protection Mobility Scheme within any 12 month period;
- b) Only flats or maisonettes be offered, not houses;
- c) Only accommodation with no more than two bedrooms be offered; and
- d) The Head of Housing Services being satisfied that the applicant is unlikely to cause, or be the cause, of any anti-social behaviour.

6. At its last meeting, the Scrutiny Panel recommended to the Cabinet a number of changes to the Housing Allocations Scheme, which were subsequently agreed, to take effect from the 1 April 2006. If it is recommended to respond to occasional requests from the Witness Protection Mobility Scheme, it will require a minor change to the Allocations Scheme. It is therefore suggested that this takes effect from the same date as the other changes.