



Housing, Health and Rural Affairs Policy & Scrutiny Panel

Report of: Councillor C D Nicholls
Date: 17th May 2006
Open

Housing, Health and Rural Affairs Annual Report 2005-2006

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides a comprehensive update on work undertaken by the Housing, Health and Rural Affairs Policy and Scrutiny Panel during the 2005/2006 municipal year.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Panel has met seven times during the 2005 – 2006 municipal year.
- 2.2 The Panel agreed its Work Programme and topics for future scrutiny with regard to the Council's Community Strategy, Corporate Plan and Key Commitments at its first meeting on the 31st May 2005.

3. Scrutiny Review Topics and Work Areas

- 3.1 The Panel, at its first meeting of the year, received a presentation from the Senior Health and Sustainability Officer on the Draft Worcestershire Climate Change Strategy and its implications for Wyre Forest. The Panel identified Climate Change as its main scrutiny priority and agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to investigate ways in which the Council could become more energy efficient and sign up to the Worcestershire Climate Change Strategy. At its meeting on 22nd November 2005, the Panel made fourteen recommendations to Cabinet, all of which were agreed. Wyre Forest District Council has now signed up to the Worcestershire Climate Change Pledge and the Panel will continue to find energy saving ideas for the Council.
- 3.2 The Panel, following a presentation from the Wyre Forest Primary Care Trust in February 2005, felt that Smoke Free Wyre Forest was an important issue and decided to add this to its work programme. The Acting Director of Public Health attended the Panel's meeting on 26th July and gave a presentation. Following the presentation, there was also a debate on the Consultation on Smokefree Elements of the

Health Improvement and Protection Bill. The Cabinet agreed the recommendations from the Panel to support the Wyre Forest Primary Care Trust in its bid to encourage organisations to develop smoke free policies across Worcestershire. The Cabinet also agreed that the Council's response to the consultation paper be that the Council supports a total ban of smoking in all enclosed public places.

- 3.3 Following a successful scrutiny exercise in 2004 on the Provision of Services for Older People, the Panel also requested progress reports on Lifeline and on the Older Persons Supporting People Review. Nigel Fain, Acting Head of Care Services at The Community Housing Group was invited to the Panel's meeting on 22nd November 2005 and Members were encouraged to hear of the improvements that had been made to the service.
- 3.4 In October 2004, Wyre Forest District Council passed a resolution to support the Fairtrade Towns Initiative and the Panel requested an update on this. The Panel was pleased to hear that Fairtrade tea and coffee was served at all Council meetings and both the Council and its partners were making good progress in working towards realising the goals needed to achieve Fairtrade Town status.
- 3.5 At its January 2006 meeting, Panel Members considered the NHS Consultations regarding the Ambulance Trust, the Strategic Health Authority and the Primary Care Trust and made recommendations that were agreed by the Cabinet and also by Council with additional points. The Panel is still awaiting the Worcestershire Acute NHS trust consultation, which will be included in the work programme for the new municipal year.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 I found it very helpful having our first meeting early in the new municipal year 2005-2006, as this enabled us to begin our work in advance of the other Panels. I feel that the continuity of the Members within the Panel has been very good and our working relationship has gone from strength to strength. I am also pleased with the continued working partnership the Panel has shared with the Community Housing Group.
- 4.2 The Climate Change Scrutiny exercise was an excellent example of how well scrutiny can work. The Panel decided to focus on just one issue, which allowed them to tackle it in great detail. This led to successful recommendations that have been agreed by the Cabinet and some of which have already been implemented.
- 4.3 However, in the new municipal year the Panel will endeavour to review more than one topic.

- 4.4 I would like to thank all Members of the Panel and those officers who attended the meetings for their contributions and assistance in the various Scrutiny exercises. Both the support of officers and the commitment of members has led to a successful year for the Panel.

5. **List of topics covered at Housing, Health and Rural Affairs Policy and Scrutiny Panel Meetings**

31st May 2005

- Draft Worcestershire Climate Change Strategy

26th July 2005

- Smoke Free Wyre Forest
- Consultation on Smoke Free Elements of the Health Improvement and Protection Bill
- Regional Housing Strategy 2005 Consultation update
- Homelessness Strategy Review

27th September 2005

- Smoke Free Worcestershire Update from Wyre Forest Matters
- North Worcestershire Care and Repair Agency
- Fairtrade Towns Initiative

22nd November 2005

- Supporting People Review and Lifeline
- Progress report on Wyre Forest Sustainability and Affordable Warmth Strategies
- Climate Change

24th January 2006

- Ensuring a Patient-led NHS Consultations
- Homelessness Strategy Review
- Draft Private Sector Housing Assistance and Enforcement Policy

28th March 2006

- Progress report on Wyre Forest Sustainability and Affordable Warmth Strategies
- Bid for Affordable Housing Grant