

# Notice of Meeting

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## **Stronger Communities Select Committee**

**Thursday, 8th July 2010 at 6.30pm**  
in Committee Room 1 Council Offices  
Market Street Newbury

Date of despatch of Agenda: Wednesday, 30 June 2010

For further information about this Agenda, or to inspect any background documents referred to in Part I reports, please contact Stephen Chard on (01635) 519462  
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**Agenda - Stronger Communities Select Committee to be held on Thursday, 8 July 2010**  
(continued)

**To:** Councillors Ellen Crumly, David Holtby, Mollie Lock, Alan Macro (Vice-Chairman), Irene Neill (Chairman) and Ieuan Tuck

**Substitutes:** Councillors George Chandler, Billy Drummond, Adrian Edwards and Roger Hunneman

**Other Members & Officers invited:** Councillor Alan Law (Portfolio Holder: Planning, Housing and Transport Policy), David Lowe (Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager), June Graves (Head of Housing and Performance), Laura Mayes (Auditor)

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# Agenda

## Part I

	<b>Page No.</b>
1. <b>Apologies</b> To receive apologies for inability to attend the meeting (if any).	
2. <b>Minutes</b> To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of this Committee held on 11 May 2010 and 12 May 2010.	1 - 8
3. <b>Declarations of Interest</b> To receive any Declarations of Interest from Members.	
4. <b>Greater Greenham Project</b> <i>Purpose: To receive a briefing on the work of the Greater Greenham Project.</i>	9 - 10
5. <b>Housing Register</b> <i>Purpose: To consider the outcome of the audit of the Housing Register and any further work required.</i>	11 - 36
6. <b>Work Programme</b> <i>Purpose: To consider and prioritise the work programme for 2010/11.</i>	37 - 40

Andy Day - Head of Policy and Communication

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**STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON  
TUESDAY, 11 MAY 2010**

**Councillors:** Ellen Crumly, David Holtby, Mollie Lock, Alan Macro, Irene Neill and Ieuan Tuck

**PART I**

**1. Election of Chairman**

**RESOLVED** that Councillor Irene Neill be elected Chairman of the Stronger Communities Select Committee for the 2010/11 Municipal Year.

**Councillor Irene Neill in the Chair.**

**2. Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence received.

**3. Appointment of Vice-Chairman**

**RESOLVED** that Councillor Alan Macro be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Stronger Communities Select Committee for the 2010/11 Municipal Year.

**CHAIRMAN** .....

**Date of Signature** .....

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## STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

### MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 12 MAY 2010

**Councillors:** Ellen Crumly (AP), David Holtby (A), Roger Hunneman (SP), Mollie Lock (AP), Alan Macro (Vice-Chairman) (P), Irene Neill (Chairman) (P), Ieuan Tuck (P)

**Also Present:** Mel Brain (Housing Strategy Manager), June Graves (Head of Housing and Performance), Andy Tubbs (Chief Adviser for School Improvement), Stephen Chard (Policy Officer)

#### PART I

#### 4. Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting were received on behalf of Councillor Mollie Lock and Councillor Ellen Crumly. Councillor Roger Hunneman substituted for Councillor Mollie Lock.

#### 5. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 February 2010 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### 6. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

#### 7. Housing Partnership briefing

The Committee received a briefing on the work of the Housing Partnership (Agenda Item 4).

June Graves provided the Committee with the following information on the work of the sub-partnership:

- The new Housing Strategy was out for consultation. The Strategy and associated action plan were owned by the Partnership.
- The key actions for the period 2010 to 2015 were:
  1. Prevention of homelessness.
  2. Provision of new affordable housing to meet urgent and identified need.
  3. Green and sustainable activities that reduced fuel poverty and CO2 emissions.
  4. Focus on meeting the needs of rural communities.

It was questioned whether the target of having 25% of new affordable homes in rural areas was sustainable. June Graves advised that the planning system did take into account sustainability for new developments, there were also rural exception sites.

5. Partnership working to maximise efficiencies.

The target to explore opportunities for new development via Single Conversation and Total Place were then discussed. June Graves explained that in some ways these

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## STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE - 12 May 2010 - MINUTES

initiatives were linked. Single Conversation encouraged partnership working across local authorities and Berkshire wide work was being considered. Similarly Total Place looked to combine resources across local authorities and organisations to see what improvements could be made. Pilot schemes were being evaluated for Total Place.

- Plans were in place to widen the Partnership's membership to enhance involvement from the private sector.
- The effectiveness of the Partnership had been reviewed during 2009 and this had led to a number of actions being highlighted. There had been complete agreement to these actions from the members of the Partnership, in order to make improvements and address challenges.
- A challenge nationally was the reduction of public sector funding and therefore funding for affordable housing. This was another area where closer partnership working and pooled resources were required.

Discussion then returned to the 25% target of affordable homes in rural areas and it was queried how this target, and the corresponding number of units, related to the number of new homes indicated through the Core Strategy. June Graves and Mel Brain agreed to explore this further with Planning.

June Graves concluded her presentation by stating that one of the main purposes of the Partnership was effective communication in order to keep residents and organisations informed of initiatives etc. In addition, while the Partnership would not build homes, there were practical initiatives that could be developed in partnership, i.e. engaging the private sector. The Partnership was felt to be a more effective way of working on housing initiatives than the Council operating in isolation.

**RESOLVED that** June Graves and Mel Brain would explore how the 25% target of affordable homes in rural areas related to the number of new homes indicated through the Core Strategy.

### 8. Empty Homes

The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 5) providing an update on progress of the Empty Homes Strategy (EHS) 2008-2011.

Mel Brain introduced the report and made the following points:

- The EHS was adopted in July 2008. Prior to this, there had been no co-ordinated approach to tackling the issue of empty homes since a Sovereign funded secondment came to a close in 2003. There had been no dedicated resource for this work between 2003 and 2008.
- Since 2008 the Council has made a capital allocation of £75,000 per annum to support the implementation of the EHS with a 0.5 FTE post assigned to the work. The current Capital Programme showed the funding ending from 2014/15 onwards.
- Empty homes were seen as a wasted resource and the purpose of the EHS was to bring them into use. This was not specifically for affordable housing and only applied to residential dwellings.
- As of 1 April 2010, there were 1419 empty dwellings in West Berkshire, excluding second homes, of which 407 had been empty for longer than 6 months. This represented approximately 2.26% of the overall housing stock. This figure had decreased since April 2008, but the Council could only report on those dwellings which had been brought back into use following the Council's involvement.

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- Property owners were encouraged in a number of ways to bring dwellings back into use. This included financial assistance via the Empty Homes Grant, the Empty Home Flexible Loan or a combination of both. In all cases, a land charge was placed against the property as financial security for the assistance provided.
- However, many owners were resistant to the Council's approaches and it was at this point that enforcement action was considered. This was supported by powers held by the Council, for example, by Building Control, Environmental Health and Planning and were intended to deal with specific nuisance issues or dangerous structures. If a local authority had undertaken work in default under these powers then it was possible to enforce the sale of a dwelling.
- Another possibility was the Public Request to Order Disposal which enabled members of the public to request disposal of certain publicly owned property.
- Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) was another step a local authority could take to ultimately secure that a dwelling became and remained occupied either with or without the owners consent. However, EDMO's would first need to be authorised by the Residential Property Tribunal.
- The first year of the EHS had been one of putting procedures in place and training staff. Although a proactive approach had still been taken in contacting property owners.
- The EHS adopted the former Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) definition for monitoring purposes. This definition was "the number of non-local authority owned vacant dwellings returned to occupation or demolished during the financial year as a direct result of action by the local authority". This did not require dwellings to have been vacant for 6 months or longer and therefore monitoring was extended to include the use of the Threshold Loan Scheme (TLS) for homes that had been vacant for less than 6 months.
- The target was to bring 18 homes back into use every year, with at least 4 of the empty homes brought back into use via grant funding. This target reflected a best value annual improvement of 2.5% of the total long term empty stock, this was based on the advice of the Empty Homes Agency. If this was fully applied then the target could actually be reduced to 10 dwellings.
- In 2009/10, 57 homes had been brought back into use based on the BVPI definition. 43 were via the TLS with Q4 figures yet to be included and the remaining 14 were as a result of direct intervention through the EHS. It was added that homes brought back into use as a result of the first letter of encouragement were not included in this figure.
- Grant funding had not needed to be used for any of the 14 homes brought back into use and therefore this funding could be legitimately used for enforcement action.
- An Empty Homes Panel had been formed to help manage the most difficult cases for dwellings that had been empty for a considerable length of time and whose owners had been resisting the advice and financial assistance on offer. The Panel intended to meet quarterly and would involve the Portfolio Holder and Ward Members.

Members then asked Mel Brain a number of questions and she responded as follows:

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- Homes could remain empty for a variety of reasons and was not just for homes that required major work. This included a dwelling being purchased as an investment; where an owner was not confident to let the property; or where an owner was unsure how to make best use of it.
- Cases varied and so therefore did the approach taken in terms of enforcement. Many standard letters were sent and extensive dialogue was engaged in to seek to bring a home back into use before enforcement became an option. The impact these methods had were being tested.
- People who owned a second home could previously pay a reduced Council Tax. However, this was no longer the case and property owners did, in some cases, use that as a defence for not bringing the property back into use. Mel Brain agreed to investigate whether the Council had the power to increase Council Tax for those owning a second home.
- The detailed work that was required for many properties could take considerable time. However, occupying these properties did have a positive impact in communities.
- On the topic of additional resources, June Graves acknowledged that this would enable more work to be done which could raise the number of dwellings brought back into use.
- While it was not possible for a non residential property to be brought into use, there was the potential for a Registered Social Landlord or a developer to purchase a property on the open market and bring it into use in that way.

**RESOLVED that** Mel Brain would investigate whether the Council had the power to increase Council Tax levels for those owning a second home.

### 9. **Scrutiny review into the performance of schools in West Berkshire**

The Committee considered the report outlining the results of the investigation into the performance of schools in West Berkshire (Agenda Item 6).

Members discussed the draft recommendations and in the main these were approved. However, amendments were requested to the following recommendations:

- Minor amendments were requested to recommendations 4 and 6.
- Andy Tubbs raised a concern that while it was a good recommendation, there was no budget to support recommendation 12 for teacher retraining and suggested that the recommendation should state this was subject to resources. A Member suggested that this could be seen as an invest to save area.
- It was suggested that the responsibility for recommendation 14 (to commit resource levels for School Improvement) rested with the Executive rather than the individual Portfolio Holder. In addition, it was felt that the recommendation should be amended to say that resource levels should be increased and not just maintained.
- Discussion then followed with regard to the Standards and Effectiveness Panel and recommendation 15. A view was given that the scrutiny review pointed to a need for an increased profile for the Panel and that the recommendation did not reflect that. It was stated that the Panel did highlight the majority of schools that had caused concern following school visits and it was therefore felt that the Panel was working effectively. Andy Tubbs added that Headteachers valued the informal Member visits which encouraged openness. The Terms of Reference for the Panel



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had been updated and as part of this it had been suggested that the reports produced by Members should be received by the Select Committee as Part 2 reports. The reports were already usefully shared within the Education Service.

**RESOLVED that** the amended recommendations would be circulated to the Scrutiny and Partnership Manager, who produced the report, and to the Select Committee for final approval. The report would then be sent to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission for their endorsement.

### 10. Work Programme

The Committee considered the work programme for 2010/11 (Agenda Item 7).

Agenda items for the next meeting on 8 July 2010 were agreed as:

- A briefing on the work of the Greater Greenham Project.
- Implementation of the Social Inclusion Strategy.

The timescale for the work to support small schools meant that it was unlikely that a report would be received by the Select Committee until its meeting scheduled for 21 October 2010.

In its place, it was suggested that an item should be added to the agenda to consider whether the difficulties reported by a number of local authorities with primary school placements had an effect in West Berkshire.

**RESOLVED that** the work programme would be noted.

*(The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.10 pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

**Date of Signature** .....

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# Agenda Item 4.

<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Greater Greenham Project</b>
<b>Report to be considered by:</b>	Stronger Communities Select Committee
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	08 July 2010

**Purpose of Report:** To receive a briefing on the work of the Greater Greenham Project.

**Recommended Action:** To note the information.

<b>Stronger Communities Select Committee Chairman</b>	
<b>Name &amp; Telephone No.:</b>	Councillor Irene Neill – Tel (0118) 9712671
<b>E-mail Address:</b>	ineill@westberks.gov.uk
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## **Supporting Information**

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### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 At the Stronger Communities Select Committee held on 16 February 2010 Members asked to receive a briefing on the work of the Greater Greenham Project. This was in order to understand the benefits this project was bringing to the residents of Greenham, particularly the most vulnerable.
- 1.2 David Lowe, Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager, will be in attendance for the item to provide a presentation detailing the work of the Greater Greenham Project and to answer Members' questions.

### **Appendices**

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There are no Appendices to this report.

# Agenda Item 5.

<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Housing Register</b>
<b>Report to be considered by:</b>	Stronger Communities Select Committee
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	08 July 2010

**Purpose of Report:** To consider the outcome of the audit of the Housing Register and any further work required.

**Recommended Action:** To note the findings of the audit report and the resultant action plan to assess whether further work is required.

<b>Stronger Communities Select Committee</b>	
<b>Name &amp; Telephone No.:</b>	Councillor Irene Neill – Tel (0118) 9712671
<b>E-mail Address:</b>	ineill@westberks.gov.uk

<b>Contact Officer Details</b>	
<b>Name:</b>	Stephen Chard
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## **Supporting Information**

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### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 At the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission held on 26 January 2010 an item was added to the work programme of the Stronger Communities Select Committee to review the workings of the Housing Register.
- 1.2 At that time an audit of the register was already scheduled and therefore the scrutiny work was delayed until the completion of the audit.
- 1.3 The audit was conducted in March 2010 and both the terms of reference for the audit and the final audit report are attached as appendices. The audit report contains an action plan for the service.
- 1.4 Councillor Alan Law, Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Transport Policy, June Graves, Head of Housing and Performance and Laura Mayes, Auditor have been invited to the meeting to aid discussion and answer any questions.

### **2. Recommendation for the Stronger Communities Select Committee**

- 2.1 Members of the Select Committee are asked to note the findings of the audit report and the resultant action plan to assess whether further work is required.

### **Appendices**

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Appendix A – Audit of the Housing Register - Terms of Reference

Appendix B – Audit of the Housing Register – Final Report

**Terms of Reference**

**Head of Housing and Performance**

**Allocation of Housing Accommodation**

**March 2010**

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Audit Plan for 2009/10 includes an allocation for the review of the Council's Allocation of Housing Accommodation.
- 1.2 Under the Housing Act 1996, amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, Local Authorities have a duty to determine priorities for the allocation of housing to eligible persons, and to define the procedures to be followed in allocating social housing accommodation.

## 2. Objectives

The following audit objectives have been identified for the review.

- 2.1 To ensure that the Council has an allocation scheme for determining priorities for the allocation of housing accommodation and that this is in line with key legislation / guidance.

This will involve reviewing the Council's Allocation Policy / framework to ensure that it meets the requirements of the following key areas of legislation / guidance:-

- a) the housing accommodation is only allocated to qualifying persons;
  - b) the priority scheme is framed so that preference is given to those persons as specified in the legislation.
- 2.2 To ensure that there are adequate procedures and processes in place covering all aspects of the housing allocation process and these processes are being complied with.

In order to assess this, we will cover the following:-

- a) Roles and responsibilities covering the administration of the allocation of housing accommodation, including the decision making process;
- b) The procedures covering an applicants right for a review of the decision on their housing application / suitability of the accommodation allocated;
- c) Management information is produced to ensure that the defined procedures / processes are being complied with.

On a sample basis, we will check that the procedures are being followed and the scheme is being adhered to when accommodation is assigned.



### **3. Approach to the work**

We will adopt the following approach to the audit:-

- 3.1 To discuss with relevant service managers and staff what systems and procedures are in operation in relation to the identified objectives.
- 3.2 To review the systems and procedures in place to ensure that they are well controlled, meet the defined objectives timely, effectively and economically.
- 3.3 To obtain relevant documentation, and test on a sample basis that the controls set up are working as expected.

### **4. Reporting**

- 4.1 Initially, the draft report will be issued as a 'rough draft' in order for the relevant service manager to check for factual accuracy prior to the formal draft being issued. The formal draft report will be issued to the Head of Service, unless there are any fundamental weaknesses identified, in which case the relevant Corporate Director and the Head of Finance will also be issued a copy prior to the Final Report being issued.
- 4.2 It is intended to have a rough draft report prepared by the end of June 2010. Please note, that one of the major factors in our achievement of this timeframe is the provision of timely information required for the audit.

A meeting will be arranged to discuss the draft report prior to a final version being issued.

- 4.3 For your information, where an audit report has an overall opinion of weak/very weak and/or there are any significant/fundamental weaknesses we are required to provide the relevant Portfolio member a copy of the report/follow-up report.

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Private and Confidential

June Graves Head of Housing and Performance

**Statutory Housing Register**

**May 2010**

**Final Report**

Issued by: Laura Mayes (Auditor)

**Internal Audit**

**Final Report**

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## **1. Executive Summary**

### **1.1 Background**

1.1.1 The 2009/10 audit programme included an allocation of time for the audit of control processes in place for the Statutory Housing Register. The Auditor was Laura Mayes and the audit was undertaken between 11<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> March 2010.

### **1.2 Overall Audit Opinion**

1.2.1 In our opinion the controls within the systems and procedures reviewed during this audit are **satisfactory**.

### **1.3 Summary of Main Findings**

1.3.1 **To ensure the Council has an allocation scheme for determining priorities for the allocation of housing accommodation and that it is in line with key legislation/guidance.**

We identified that the Council has in place an Allocation Scheme based on legislation and guidance however we do note that the current scheme has not been reviewed since 2007 **See finding 01.01 recommendations 1**. From a review of the management and administration of the Statutory Housing Register and the system used to record this information, it was noted that functions within Locata are not fully utilised to document client contact/ correspondence to ensure that a clear audit trail is in place and demonstrate compliance with processes and procedures **See findings 01.03 & 01.04 recommendations 3 and 4**. Furthermore the access listing within Locata had not been recently reviewed resulting in ex-employees retaining the ability to access client details via Locata **See finding 01.02 recommendations 2**. On occasion we found that clients had been entered onto the Housing Register and allocated “Live” status where either no identification had been provided or the items provided were expired at the time **See finding 01.05 recommendations 5**.

**1.3.2 To ensure that there are adequate procedures and processes in place covering all aspects of the housing allocation process and these processes are being complied with.**

We found that although the service has in place a process for reporting on applications and their status, Locata is not being fully utilised to produce the information and data is being extracted and manually reported. Manual reports produced are not client specific and therefore effective monitoring of client progress through the housing system cannot be undertaken i.e. it is not possible to determine those applications which remain outstanding week on week. **See finding 02.04 Recommendation 6.**

**2 Detailed Audit Findings**

<u>Ref</u>	<u>Risks</u>	<u>Expected Controls</u>	<u>Actual Controls</u>	<u>Results</u>	<u>Conclusions</u>	<u>Recommendation ref.</u>
<b>01. To ensure the Council has an allocation scheme for determining priorities for the allocation of housing accommodation and that it is in line with key legislation/guidance.</b>						
01	The allocation scheme is not appropriately administered	The allocation process in place should comply with the Housing Act 1996 section 1a. Controls should in place to ensure that allocations of housing are made in compliance with the allocation scheme.	The allocation process in place complies with the Housing Act 1996 section 1a. Controls are in place to ensure that allocations of housing are made in compliance with the allocation scheme.	<p>The Common Housing Register was introduced in 2006 and was jointly managed by WBC and Sovereign Housing until March 2007 when Choice Based Lettings was introduced and the Council took over full management of the Register.</p> <p>The West Berkshire Housing Allocation Policy - Home choice West Berks - Choice Based Lettings in West Berkshire dated 30/11/2006 was reviewed and found to clearly document in detail the allocation process including the points scheme, its application during bidding and the partner associations utilised by WBC to provide housing. The Allocation Scheme and Policy were found to be in line with legislative requirements per the Housing Act 1996.</p> <p>The allocation of housing is based on a points system. Registered clients are awarded points based on their current living accommodation, the facilities it</p>	This area was found to be satisfactory	1

<u>Ref</u>	<u>Risks</u>	<u>Expected Controls</u>	<u>Actual Controls</u>	<u>Results</u>	<u>Conclusions</u>	<u>Recommendation ref.</u>
				<p>provides, number of occupants including the number and ages of any children, disabilities, medical and social needs, post natal requirements, and location which includes proximity to suitable schooling. This system of allocation is in line with the Housing Act 1996 section 167 part 2 items a - f.</p> <p>We do note that Section 19 of the WBC Allocation Policy states that the policy should be reviewed and re-approved annually. The last approval date is documented on the policy as 30/11/2006.</p>		
02	Ineligible individuals are included within the Housing Register and are able to make bids on housing.	The register should be held securely with access appropriately restricted. Controls should be in place to ensure that unauthorised amendments to the register cannot be made and the personal details of	The register is held securely with access appropriately restricted. Controls are in place to ensure that unauthorised amendments to the register cannot be made and the personal details of registered remain	<p>The Locata software is utilised to record and manage the housing register electronically. Additionally paper client files are maintained and held securely in lockable cabinets and a lockable storage room.</p> <p>In respect of the Locata system, there are currently 44 users listed with 14 having full user rights. User rights are allocated on the basis of job role requirements. These users consisted of Housing Options Officers, Housing Registers Assistants, Tenancy Support Workers, Rent Deposit Officers and the Housing Options Team</p>	Locata user access is awarded in line with job role requirements. However via testing we did find that the access list is not regularly reviewed to ensure that ex-staff or other users who no longer require access are removed from the system.	2



<u>Ref</u>	<u>Risks</u>	<u>Expected Controls</u>	<u>Actual Controls</u>	<u>Results</u>	<u>Conclusions</u>	<u>Recommendation ref.</u>
		individuals registered remain secure.	secure.	<p>Leader, Housing Register Officer and Specialist Housing Supervisor. These officers are able to: record bids, amend properties and members, make offers, undertake partner admin, record offer results, setup and edit questionnaires and set up and edit user schemes and details. Other access given to WBC employees and external users from Sovereign Housing Association is as above with the exception of set up and edit of scheme users and questionnaires.</p> <p>16 of the 44 individuals with access rights in Locator were not identifiable as current Council employees. Four users were verified as employees of Sovereign Housing. Ten individuals, 3 of which have full access rights, were identified as former WBC employees who had not been removed from the system.</p> <p>In respect of individuals external to WBC, all applicants / individuals listed on the register create their own unique password. Clients are restricted to accessing their own personal details via password access. Clients do not have access to the details of others unless they are undertaking a mutual</p>		

<u>Ref</u>	<u>Risks</u>	<u>Expected Controls</u>	<u>Actual Controls</u>	<u>Results</u>	<u>Conclusions</u>	<u>Recommendation ref.</u>
				exchange. Mutual exchange is agreed between WBC Housing Officers and clients.		
03	The allocation scheme is not appropriately administered	The allocation process in place should comply with the Housing Act 1996 section 1a. Controls should in place to ensure that allocations of housing are made in compliance with the allocation scheme.	The allocation process in place complies with the Housing Act 1996 section 1a. Controls are in place to ensure that allocations of housing are made in compliance with the allocation scheme.	<p>Client information regarding the annual re-registration can be found under section 7.5 of the WBC Allocation Policy.</p> <p>The Housing Act 1996 (Section 163 points 1 - 7) states that: "A local housing authority may remove a person from their housing register in such circumstances as they think fit. They shall do so - a) if it appears that he has never been a qualifying person or is no longer such a person, or b) if he requests them to do so and he is not owed any duty under section 193 or 195(2)" "Before removing a person from the register, a local housing authority shall comply with such requirements, as to notification or otherwise".</p> <p>The process for review was undertaken as follows:</p> <p>I) A letter was sent to all registered clients with an Annual Review Form attached.</p> <p>ii) Where forms are not returned within 28 days of issue, WBC undertake a follow up telephone call as a final attempt to contact</p>	<p>Overall a process for the review and removal of individuals from the register is in place. However, utilising the results of our sample it was identified that Locata is not fully utilised to record adherence to the process. Furthermore, physical evidence such as letters issued are not routinely retained.</p> <p>Clients had not been notified of their right to appeal post removal from the Statutory Housing Register.</p>	3, 4

<u>Ref</u>	<u>Risks</u>	<u>Expected Controls</u>	<u>Actual Controls</u>	<u>Results</u>	<u>Conclusions</u>	<u>Recommendation ref.</u>
				<p>the client</p> <p>iii) Where the review form is not received and telephone call not answered the client is removed from the Housing Register with the reason code set in Locata as "failed to re-register".</p> <p>iv) A manual printout is annotated for each application month stating the action taken for each client.</p> <p>Since the annual review exercise commenced in April 2009 there have been 3433 clients removed from the housing register in total.</p> <p>A sample review of 20 recent removals from the Statutory Housing Register was undertaken:</p> <p>I) in 19 instances the client notes and CRM journal function had not been utilised to record actions taken, letters issued, telephone call made and correspondence received</p> <p>ii) In 20 instances the client had not been informed of their removed status. In all 20 cases the removed individual had not reapplied to be placed on the register at the time of audit.</p>		

<u>Ref</u>	<u>Risks</u>	<u>Expected Controls</u>	<u>Actual Controls</u>	<u>Results</u>	<u>Conclusions</u>	<u>Recommendation ref.</u>
				iii) In 20 instances copies of the annual review letter issued had not been retained in the client file or uploaded into Locata in the electronic client file.		
04	Ineligible individuals are included within the Housing Register and are able to make bids on housing.	The Housing Register should be regularly reviewed and maintained. Controls should be in place to ensure that only those qualifying/eligible individuals are included and able to make bids	The Housing Register is regularly reviewed and maintained. Controls are in place to ensure that only those qualifying/eligible individuals are included and able to make bids	<p>Client details are reviewed on the annual anniversary of their addition to the housing register.</p> <p>We sampled tested 30 clients, 10 whose details had been updated and 20 who had been removed from the register sourced from the annual review listing from Locata for the month of February 2010.</p> <p>In the case of the 10 updated clients we found:</p> <p>I) in only 7 cases were there copies of the update letters issued held in the client paper file although confirmation letters agreed with the amendment request/annual review form</p> <p>ii) in only one instance was a PDF letter attached to the client notes within Locata</p> <p>In the case of the 20 removed clients we found:</p> <p>I) a copy of the annual review letter was not held in the client file or recorded in the</p>	Whilst we acknowledge there is a process in place, as per finding 01.01.06, Locata is not consistently and fully utilised to evidence compliance with processes and procedures.	3

<u>Ref</u>	<u>Risks</u>	<u>Expected Controls</u>	<u>Actual Controls</u>	<u>Results</u>	<u>Conclusions</u>	<u>Recommendation ref.</u>
				<p>client notes on Locata as having been issued in all 20 cases.</p> <p>ii) In all 20 cases Locata had been updated to show that the client had been removed from the register, the reason for removal was set as "failed to re-register."</p> <p>None of our sample of removed clients was found to have re-registered and been reset to Live in Locata at the time of the audit.</p>		
05	Ineligible individuals are included within the Housing Register and are able to make bids on housing.	The Housing Register should be regularly reviewed and maintained. Controls should be in place to ensure that only those qualifying/eligible individuals are included and able to make bids	The Housing Register is regularly reviewed and maintained. Controls are in place to ensure that only those qualifying/eligible individuals are included and able to make bids	<p>From review of the Post Log maintained by the Housing Operations Team it was ascertained that from April 2009 to March 2010 there have been 729 paper application for the Housing Register - an average of 14 per week and 2184 online applications - an average of 42 per week.</p> <p>We undertook a sample check of 30 recent applications to the Common Housing Register (20 of which were online and 10 manual) and noted the following exceptions:</p> <p>For the 20 online applications:</p> <p>i) in 2 instances no identification had been provided in line with procedures yet the clients had been allocated Live status in</p>	Overall the application process for both online and paper submissions was found to be satisfactory. However we do note that on occasion clients are entered onto the Common Housing Register and set to Live status without having provided the appropriate identification. We further note that in some instances identification provided had in fact expired.	5

<u>Ref</u>	<u>Risks</u>	<u>Expected Controls</u>	<u>Actual Controls</u>	<u>Results</u>	<u>Conclusions</u>	<u>Recommendation ref.</u>
				<p>Locata</p> <p>ii) in one instance one household member had provided expired identification</p> <p>iii) in one instance no documentation was held from the Worker Registration Scheme in relation to the client where applicable.</p> <p>For the 10 manual applications:</p> <p>i) in 2 instances it was noted that the identification provided had expired</p> <p>ii) in 1 instance no ID could be found in the client file yet the client had been allocated Live status in Locata</p> <p>iii) in one instance the same WBC staff member had uploaded the information into Locata and verified the application giving it Live status.</p>		
<b>02. To ensure that there are adequate procedures and processes in place covering all aspects of the housing allocation process and these processes are being complied with</b>						
01	The allocation scheme is not appropriately administered	Procedural guidance should be in place to ensure that internal members of staff have a	Procedural guidance is in place to ensure that internal members of staff have a thorough	The main legislation utilised by the service upon which internal guidance is based are as follows: Communities and Local Government - Fair and Flexible: guidance on social housing allocations for Local authorities in England 2009, The Housing	Appropriate guidance was found to be in place. However we did note the following minor points: i) the housing register application	1

<u>Ref</u>	<u>Risks</u>	<u>Expected Controls</u>	<u>Actual Controls</u>	<u>Results</u>	<u>Conclusions</u>	<u>Recommendation ref.</u>
		thorough working knowledge of the allocation scheme and how it is administered.	working knowledge of the allocation scheme and how it is administered.	<p>Act 1996 and Homelessness Act 2002.</p> <p>WBC has in place the following guidance:</p> <p>Homechoice West Berks - Housing Allocation Policy, WBC Common Housing Register - Welfare and Social needs housing matrix and WBC Homechoice West Berkshire Scheme User Guide. There are also four forms in place - Two are completed by service staff at the assessment stage: Common Housing Register Notes for Medical Panel and Common housing Register - Social Needs Assessment All items of guidance can be located on the WBC intranet and internet pages.</p> <p>In addition there are a series of internal procedural instructions available to staff regarding the input and management of housing applications using Locata. These are maintained by the Housing Register Officer. Guidance documents how to upload manual applications, verification, removal, suspension, editing, processing online applications, the annual review and CBL procedures. The guidance was found to be sufficiently detailed and is available to Housing staff within their shared drive</p>	<p>form does not document where a medical or social needs assessment would be required although the WBC Allocation Policy does state under sections 7.2 and 7.3 the right to request a review of medical/social needs</p> <p>ii) Upon review we found that the annual review had not been undertaken for the Allocation Policy or the Scheme User Guide.</p>	

<u>Ref</u>	<u>Risks</u>	<u>Expected Controls</u>	<u>Actual Controls</u>	<u>Results</u>	<u>Conclusions</u>	<u>Recommendation ref.</u>
				allocation.		
02	The allocation scheme is not appropriately administered	Guidance should be issued/publicly available to individuals wishing to access housing. Standard application forms should be utilised and information outlining the bidding process should be issued to applicants.	Guidance should be issued/publicly available to individuals wishing to access housing. Standard application forms should be utilised and information outlining the bidding process should be issued to applicants.	Publicly issued guidance consists of Homechoice West Berkshire Scheme User Guide Version 3 Spring 2008. This guidance gives detailed information on how to bid, which properties will be applicable and guidance regarding the next steps where a client bid is successful. Guidance is available on the WBC internet site and is sufficiently comprehensive. The guide states, under Step 1 - Membership, how and where to obtain an application for the Common Housing Register and which WBC team to contact for advice.  The WBC Homechoice website links to the application form directly under the Register tab.  From the review of 30 new applications undertaken in test 01.08 we found that:  i) in only one instance had ID not been submitted in line with instructions  ii) in only one instance the paper application had been returned to the client to be re-submitted with ID This demonstrates that the user guide provides sufficient guidance on the application	This area was found to be well controlled.	N/a



<u>Ref</u>	<u>Risks</u>	<u>Expected Controls</u>	<u>Actual Controls</u>	<u>Results</u>	<u>Conclusions</u>	<u>Recommendation ref.</u>
				process and documentary requirements.		
03	The housing register is not appropriately administered	Guidance should be available in respect of an applicant's right to appeal. Controls should be in place to ensure that appeals are recorded, dealt with in a timely manner and the applicant notified of any resolutions/final decisions. Guidance should be	Guidance is available in respect of an applicant's right to appeal. Controls are in place to ensure that appeals are recorded, dealt with in a timely manner and the applicant notified of any resolutions/final decisions. Guidance is	<p>Guidance provided to clients regarding their right to appeal consists of that under S17 of the Allocation Policy the Review Procedure document.</p> <p>It was confirmed with the HOTL that the most recent appeal occurred in 2009. The request for review form was received by WBC 29/06/2009 with the review being undertaken 31/07/2009 This appeal related to a homeless client being moved from temporary to permanent accommodation. The decision letter was issued to the client 17/08/2009 stating that the original decision was to be upheld. The time between receipt of the request for a review and decision was found to fall within the eight week timescale required by the Allocation Policy under S17 Right to Review.</p> <p>The appeal was found to have been undertaken by the appropriate staff which consisted of the Portfolio Member for Housing, the Head of Housing and Performance and the Housing Operations Manager.</p> <p>All appropriate documentation had been</p>	This area was found to be well controlled.	N/a

<u>Ref</u>	<u>Risks</u>	<u>Expected Controls</u>	<u>Actual Controls</u>	<u>Results</u>	<u>Conclusions</u>	<u>Recommendation ref.</u>
				retained including items received from the client and correspondence from the Council.		
04	The housing register is not appropriately administered	Regular management reports should be generated to ensure that applications are dealt with appropriately and in a timely manner, the register is up to date, amendments and removals are processed in a timely manner and the bid process is being correctly administered.	Regular management reports are generated to ensure that applications are dealt with appropriately and in a timely manner, the register is up to date, amendments and removals are processed in a timely manner and the bid process is being correctly administered.	Regular monitoring is undertaken within the service via weekly management meetings. The HRO Obtains data utilising Locata and manual files to produce a summary sheet titled Performance Monitoring Process for Re-structure of Housing Operations Service. Information taken from Locata includes: removals, suspensions, online applications awaiting validation and current live total. Information taken from manual sources includes: total annual review forms received for the week, total update forms received for the week, paper applications received, client updates undertaken and paper forms awaiting input into Locata. On a quarterly basis information is manually obtained from Locata to document Vulnerability Figures. This information is limited and only gives the total for each category and the number of clients currently not bidding.  This information is reviewed against the prior week and minutes of meetings record	Although the service has in place a process for reporting on applications and their status, Locata is not being fully utilised to produce management reports.  Information regarding outstanding applications/ applications awaiting processing is provided however only the total numbers are stated on the report to managers. Therefore with no listing of client names produced from the system (where applications are online) and from the post log (where applications are manual) it is not possible to determine whether certain applications are outstanding week on week. It was also noted that the vulnerability figures element of the report is only completed on a quarterly basis and does not provide detailed information such as how long clients have not been bidding or	6

<u>Ref</u>	<u>Risks</u>	<u>Expected Controls</u>	<u>Actual Controls</u>	<u>Results</u>	<u>Conclusions</u>	<u>Recommendation ref.</u>
				<p>the proposed actions.</p> <p>We noted that since April 2009 there have been 729 paper applications and 2184 online applications. Information regarding paper applications was obtained from the manually updated post log maintained by the Housing Operations Team. For the week ending 05/03/2010 116 online applications were made and awaiting processing by the HRO, 218 had been removed and 77 suspended. Ten paper applications were awaiting processing and at the time of our review were found to be only four days behind.</p> <p>The Housing Register is not subject to any form of KPI monitoring.</p>	<p>whether they have already been housed.</p>	

**3 Action Plan**

<b><u>Recommendation</u></b>	<b><u>Weakness/ Significance</u></b>	<b><u>Agreed/ Not Agreed</u></b>	<b><u>Client Comments</u></b>	<b><u>Responsible Officer/ Timescale for Implementation</u></b>
1. We recommend that the Allocation Policy be annually reviewed in line with the requirements of section 19.	Minor / advisory	Agreed	<b>Working process is under regular review from CBL working group but will be raised at next meeting .</b>	16 <sup>th</sup> June 2010 Housing Operations Manager
2. We recommend that individuals who are no longer employed by the Council or the applicable Housing Associations are promptly removed from the Locata access listing.	Moderate / necessary	Agreed	<b>This action has been completed</b>	Housing Register Officer
3. We recommend that Locata be fully utilised to record correspondence with clients. This should include telephone conversations.	Moderate/ necessary	Agreed	<b>Currently Points, change of circ information is put on&gt; It would be too time consuming if all review had to be inputted However enhancements on Locata will allow more information to be entered regarding reviews</b>	Revised package on Locata will be implemented by end June 2010  Housing Operations Manager
4. We recommend that information on the right to appeal a decision be forwarded to clients where they have been removed from the Housing Register in line with the requirements of S17 of the WBC Allocation Policy.	Minor/ advisory	Agreed	<b>Amend standard letter</b>	Housing Operations Manager End May 2010
5. We recommend that clients are not allocated Live status in Locata until their personal details have been fully and independently verified.	Minor / advisory	Not agreed	<b>1)Officers try and get up to date documents before a case is made live 2) sometimes it is difficult if expired passport received but it is out of date to request new one</b>	Housing Operations Manager in discussions with group auditor

<u>Recommendation</u>	<u>Weakness/Significance</u>	<u>Agreed/Not Agreed</u>	<u>Client Comments</u>	<u>Responsible Officer/ Timescale for Implementation</u>
			<p>which costs them money plus it raises expectations that they will be re housed ( British passports )</p> <p>3) all cases are verified at the end before offer of property is made by the RSL</p>	
6. We recommend that Locata be fully utilised to produce electronic monthly monitoring reports that not only focus on service demand but also provide trend analysis on demand by vulnerable groups.	Moderate / necessary	Agreed	<b>New enhanced package will be able to provide this</b>	Housing Operations Manager End of June 2010

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	<b>Category of weakness</b>		<b>Significance</b>
Fundamental	May result in a complete breakdown of the service and or fraud or other irregularity	Mandatory	For statutory, council regulations or service instructions fundamental control weaknesses
Significant	May result in a breakdown in the service and or fraud or other irregularity	Necessary	For Significant or moderate control weaknesses
Moderate	May result in some impact on the service	Advisory	For minor control weaknesses or efficiency improvements
Minor	Limited impact on the service		



# Agenda Item 6.

<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Work Programme</b>
<b>Report to be considered by:</b>	Stronger Communities Select Committee
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	08 July 2010

**Purpose of Report:** To consider and prioritise the work programme for 2010/11.

**Recommended Action:** To consider the current items and agree any future areas for scrutiny.

<b>Stronger Communities Select Committee Chairman</b>	
<b>Name &amp; Telephone No.:</b>	Councillor Irene Neill – Tel (0118) 9712671
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## Supporting Information

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### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Members are requested to consider the last work programme of the Select Committee attached at Appendix A, prioritise the items listed and discuss any future areas for scrutiny for 2010/11.
- 1.2 Members will note that the number of items on the work programme has reduced. This follows work between the Chairman and the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission to produce a more manageable programme of work.

### Appendices

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Appendix A – Stronger Communities Select Committee Work Programme

### Consultees

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**Local Stakeholders:** Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission

**Officers Consulted:** Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager

**Trade Union:** N/A



# STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Reference (a)	Subject/purpose (b)	Methodology (c)	Expected outcome (d)	Review Body (e)	Dates (f)	Lead Officer(s)/ Service Area (g)	Portfolio Holder(s) (h)	Comments (h)
OSMC/09/24	Accessibility of public transport Review accessibilty of public transport in West Berkshire for all residents.	Information supplied by, and questioning of, lead officers, and external partners.	For review.	GSC/SC SC	Start: 19/01/10 End:	Bryan Lyttle - 2638 and Mark Edwards - 2208 Planning & Trading Standards and Highways & Transport	Councillor Alan Law & Councillor David Betts	Joint work between GSC and SCSC to review accessibility of public transport and contribute to the work on Local Transport Plan 3. Item 68 merged with this item
OSMC/10/77	Housing waiting list To consider the workings of the list, reviews, communication with those on the waiting list.	Information supplied by, and questioning of, lead officer via in meeting review	To be identified.	SCSC	Start: 08/07/10 End:	June Graves - 2733 Housing & Performance	Councillor Alan Law	As requested by OSMC on 26th January 2010.
OSMC/09/39	Playbuilder Programme Assessment of arrangements for improving play provision.	In meeting review with information supplied by, and questioning of, lead officers.	To improve play provision.	SCSC	Start: 21/10/10 End: 21/10/10	David Hogg - 2815 Youth Services & Commissioning	Councillor Gordon Lundie	High profile activity that addresses concerns raised consistently by local people.
OSMC/09/42	Supporting Small schools To review funding pupil numbers and educational viability.	Information supplied by, and questioning of, lead officers, and external partners.		SCSC	Start: 21/10/10 End:	Ian Pearson - 2729 Education	Councillor Barbara Alexander	Retaining small rural schools is currently Council policy.
OSMC/09/47	Monitor changes introduced to the Youth Service To monitor annually the progress of the changes being introduced to the Youth Service and the impact that they make on an annual basis until 1 year after all changes have been fully introduced.	Information supplied by, and questioning of, lead officer via in meeting review	Monitoring item	SCSC	Start: 21/10/10 End:	Mark Vernon - 2552 Children & Youth Services	Councillor Gordon Lundie	This was a recommendation of the facilities for young people task group that was endorsed by the OSC.
OSMC/10/84	Primary school admissions To identify whether the difficulties reported by a number of local authorities with primary school placements had an effect in West Berkshire.	Information supplied by, and questioning of, lead officer via in meeting review	To gain an understanding of the issue.	SCSC	Start: 21/10/10 End: 21/10/10	Malcolm Berry - 2770 Education	Councillor Barbara Alexander	Accepted onto the work programme by OSMC on 25/5

# STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Reference (a)	Subject/purpose (b)	Methodology (c)	Expected outcome (d)	Review Body (e)	Dates (f)	Lead Officer(s)/ Service Area (g)	Portfolio Holder(s) (h)	Comments (h)
OSMC/09/37	Partnership activity in response to the recession. Assessment of the impact of the measures taken by the West Berkshire Partnership to mitigate the local effects of the recession.	Information supplied by, and questioning of, lead officers, and external partners.	Monitoring item	SCSC	Start: End:	Policy & Communication	Councillor Pamela Bale & Councillor Keith Chopping	High profile activity that is very topical that will give visibility to the work that the Council and its partners are doing on behalf of residents and businesses.