

Notice of Meeting

Stronger Communities Select Committee

Wednesday, 12th May, 2010 at 6.30pm
in Committee Room 1 Council Offices
Market Street Newbury

Date of despatch of Agenda: Tuesday, 4 May 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) 503041
e-mail: sshepherd@westberks.gov.uk

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Agenda - Stronger Communities Select Committee to be held on Wednesday, 12 May 2010 (continued)

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

Substitutes: Councillors Jeff Beck, Roger Hunneman, Andrew Rowles and Julian Swift-Hook

Officers and other invitees: Councillor Alan Law (Portfolio Holder: Planning, Housing and Transport Policy), June Graves (Head of Housing and Performance), Mel Brain (Housing Strategy Manager), Andy Tubbs (Chief Adviser for School Improvement)

Agenda

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1 Apologies To receive apologies for inability to attend the meeting (if any).	
2 Minutes To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of this Committee held on 16 February 2010.	1 - 4
3 Declarations of Interest To receive any Declarations of Interest from Members.	
4 Housing Partnership briefing <i>Purpose: To receive a briefing on the work of the Housing Partnership.</i>	5 - 16
5 Empty Homes <i>Purpose: To review the progress of the Empty Homes Strategy 2008-2011.</i>	17 - 26
6 Scrutiny review into the performance of schools in West Berkshire <i>Purpose: To outline the results of the investigation into the performance of schools in West Berkshire.</i>	27 - 48
7 Work Programme <i>Purpose: To consider and prioritise the work programme for 2010/11.</i>	49 - 54

Andy Day
Head of Policy and Communication

Agenda - Stronger Communities Select Committee to be held on Wednesday, 12 May 2010 *(continued)*

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STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON
16 FEBRUARY 2010**

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

Also present: Ruwan Uduwera-Perera (Vice-Chairman of the Stronger Communities Partnership) and Stephen Chard (Policy Officer)

PART I**20. APOLOGIES.**

An apology for inability to attend the meeting was received on behalf of Councillor Alan Macro.

21. MINUTES.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 October 2009 and 11 November 2009 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest received.

23. STRONGER COMMUNITIES PARTNERSHIP BRIEFING.

The Committee considered a presentation (Agenda Item 4) concerning the work of the Stronger Communities Partnership (SCP).

In the course of the presentation Ruwan Uduwera-Perera made the following points:

- This was the newest sub partnership of the West Berkshire Partnership (WBP). Its purpose was to develop and deliver a long term strategic approach to improving the quality of life of people living, working and visiting West Berkshire. This was done through working in partnership to deliver the Sustainable Community Strategy for West Berkshire – ‘A Breath of Fresh Air’.
- The agenda of the SCP would widen from April 2010 when the new Equalities Act was due to be published.
- The remit and lifespan of the SCP had been decided by its members and it was intended that the work of the SCP would come to a close after a three year period.
- A focus of activity during that time was to mainstream the Stronger theme of accessibility through the other sub partnerships, thereby removing the need to retain the SCP. This included access to health services, education, transport, the environment, the ability to access the economy, housing and cultural services. All the aspects were inter-related and were about building social capacity across the whole community and minimising deprivation.
- While membership of the SCP was sufficient, there was a need for greater representation from some sectors. Current members sought to increase this through the groups they represented.

STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE – 16 FEBRUARY 2010 – MINUTES

DRAFT

- The SCP priorities were to:
 - (1) Foster a stronger sense of belonging within West Berkshire.
 - (2) Reduce inequality and disadvantage.
 - (3) Encourage participation and engagement in community life, including increasing local involvement in volunteering.
 - (4) Ensure local services remained accessible to the population they served.
- The number of volunteers was a success, with West Berkshire being one of the best areas in the country for attracting and engaging volunteers. Much of this was down to the good work of the Volunteer Centre and the affluence of some communities in West Berkshire which gave people, particularly retired people, the time to volunteer, generally in their own community. However this was not true for all areas of the District.
- Areas of work for the SCP included:
 - the development of a Partnership Quality Mark to recognise the achievements of community groups;
 - support given to the Greater Greenham Project;
 - support given to the Hate Crime Scrutiny Panel;
 - support given to Community Cohesion conferences and Community Planning conferences.

Members then discussed areas of deprivation and it was queried whether the people in these communities were aware of this and whether there was a risk of them being labelled. Ruwan Uduwera-Perera gave his view that there were instances where communities were labelled, through the work of organisations including estate agents and employment agencies.

The ability of people in deprived areas to seek, for example, benefits advice was queried. Ruwan Uduwera-Perera advised that there was a greater demand for more specialist support and advice than previously and the number of organisations who could give such advice was reducing. Many people accessed the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB), but advice given by the CAB was often of a more general nature.

The need to improve the level of affordable housing was highlighted. In particular the use of empty properties was mentioned as a way to reduce the number of people on the housing waiting list. It was agreed that this would be added to the work programme as an area for investigation.

Finally Ruwan Uduwera-Perera stated that the SCP was keen to have critical friends and challenge, and invited the Select Committee to raise issues with the SCP whenever necessary.

RESOLVED that the use of empty properties to improve the level of affordable housing in the District would be added to the work programme as an area for review. An aspect of this would be to seek to reduce the number of people on the housing waiting list.

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24. SUPPORTING SMALL SCHOOLS.

The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 5) concerning the work to be undertaken by the Select Committee to support small schools in West Berkshire.

Councillor Irene Neill advised Members that this piece of work had been requested by Management Board. A review was therefore being led by the Head of Education Services. Councillors Irene Neill and Alan Macro were representing the Select Committee in this work, which was scheduled for completion in the summer of 2010.

In order to avoid duplication, the work being conducted by the Select Committee would not commence until the report from the Education group had been received. However this would not be just to approve the report, but would be an opportunity for the Select Committee to scrutinise the work undertaken and the proposals to help support small schools. Terms of Reference for the scrutiny work would be drawn up nearer the time and relevant officers, Headteachers, Governors and parents could be invited to provide evidence should the Select Committee want this approach. It was also suggested that the work of small school federations should be considered.

It was queried whether John O'Gaunt, which was a relatively small secondary school, could be incorporated into the work of the Education group and the Select Committee. Councillor Irene Neill agreed to take this suggestion to the first meeting of the Education group and it could also be added to the Terms of Reference for the work to be conducted by the Select Committee.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) The Select Committee's work to support small schools would commence on receipt of the Education Service's report.
- (2) Councillor Irene Neill would suggest the inclusion of John O'Gaunt to the Education group at its first meeting.

25. WORK PROGRAMME.

The Committee considered the work programme for the remainder of 2009/10 and 2010/11 (Agenda Item 6).

Further work was required on the school standards report before it was brought to the Select Committee for approval, to ensure it fully reflected the work undertaken. When completed the report would be sent to the Select Committee for approval via e-mail before going to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission (OSMC) for its endorsement.

The joint work with the Greener Select Committee to review accessibility of public transport had commenced.

An item had been added to the work programme by the OSMC to consider ways to reduce the number of people on the housing waiting list. This linked with the issue raised earlier in the meeting.

Items for the next meeting on 26 April 2010 were identified as:

- A review of the policy for private housing sector renewal.
- A briefing from either the Housing Sub Partnership of the WBP or on the work of the Greater Greenham project.

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- Partnership activity in response to the recession, to assess the impact of the measures taken to mitigate the local effects of the recession.

Discussion then followed on whether measures taken to stop smoking on school sites were adequate and whether it was a potential area for scrutiny. It was agreed that this would be more appropriate for the Healthier Select Committee and therefore the suggestion would be forwarded to them to consider its inclusion on their work programme.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) Once completed the school standards report would be e-mailed to the Select Committee Members for approval before going to the OSMC for endorsement.
- (2) The work programme would be noted and the potential item with regards to smoking on school sites would be forwarded to the Healthier Select Committee for their consideration.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.15pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature:

Housing Partnership

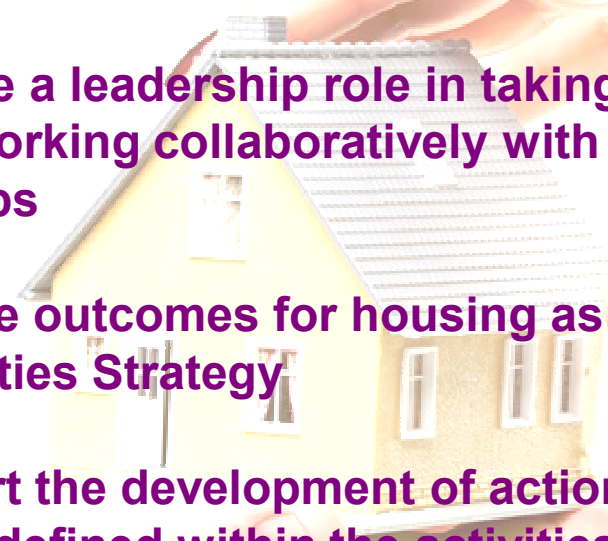


June Graves

Chair of the Housing Partnership

- 
- **Established 2007**
 - **Looking at the range of housing related issues from demand through to supply**
 - **New look with focus on added value**
 - **Broad range of membership**
 - **Established TOR, action plan with a new strategy out for consultation**

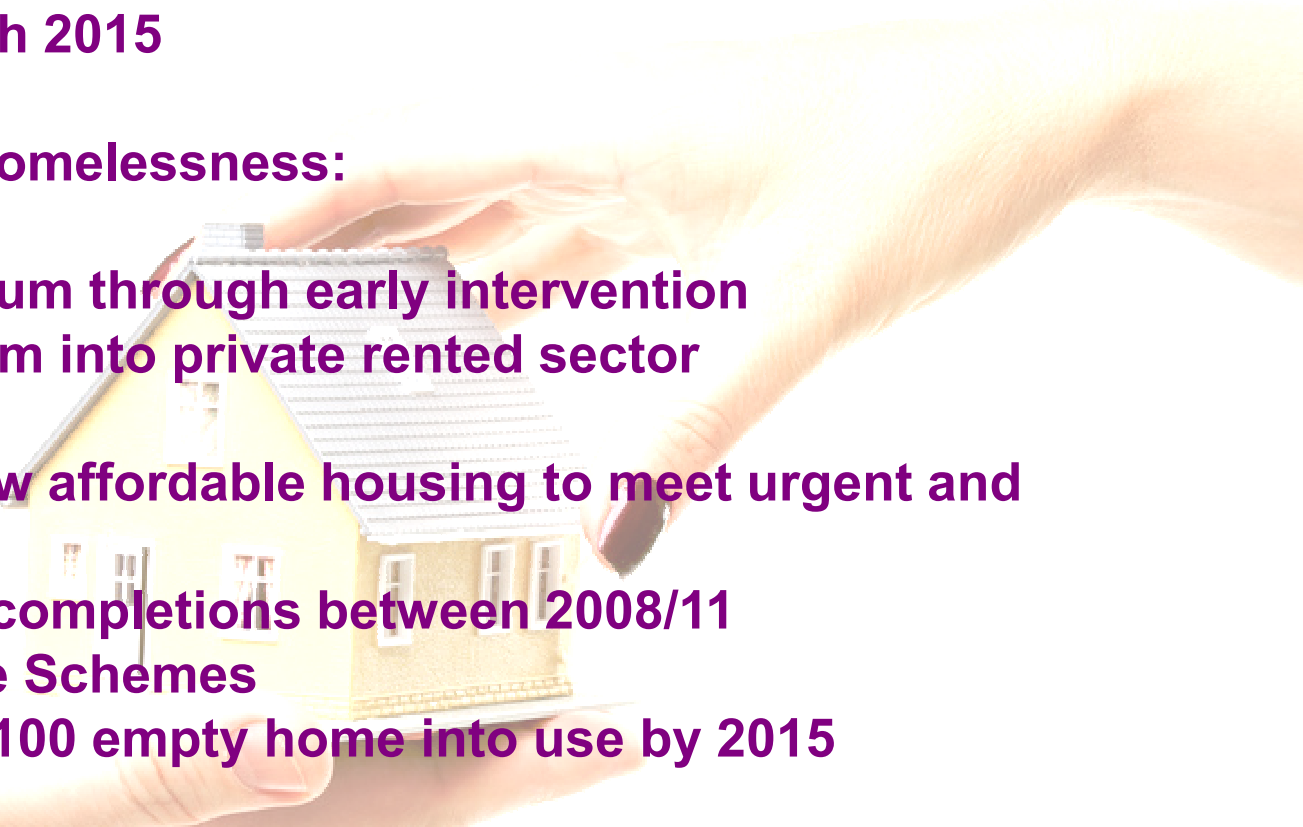
Summary Terms of Reference

- 
- To promote the housing agenda across West Berkshire to bring positive outcomes in terms of increased provision and safe, high quality housing in the district
 - To provide a leadership role in taking forward the housing agenda working collaboratively with other multi-agency LSP sub-groups
 - Deliver the outcomes for housing as identified in the Sustainable Communities Strategy
 - To support the development of action plans to deliver identified priorities defined within the activities of the Housing Sub-Partnership
 - To monitor the delivery of the relevant targets defined within the Local Area Agreement (2)

- 
- **Prevention of homelessness**
 - **Provision of new affordable housing to meet urgent and identified need**
 - **Green and sustainable activities that reduce fuel poverty and CO2 emissions**
 - **Focus on meeting the needs of rural communities**
 - **Partnership working to maximise efficiencies**

Targets for key actions 2010/15

Targets set through 2015

- **Prevention of homelessness:**
 - NI 141/142
 - 234 per annum through early intervention
 - 80 per annum into private rented sector
 - **Provision of new affordable housing to meet urgent and identified need**
 - NI 155 328 completions between 2008/11
 - 2 Extra Care Schemes
 - Bring back 100 empty home into use by 2015
 - **Green and sustainable activities the reduce fuel poverty and C02 emmissions**
 - Provide access to grants/discounted energy measures to 5000 households by 2015
- 
- A close-up photograph of a hand holding a small, yellow, two-story model house. The hand is positioned as if presenting or supporting the house. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light.

Targets for key actions 2010/15

Targets set through 2015

- **Focus on meeting needs of rural communities**
 - **25% of new affordable in rural areas**
- **Partnership working to maximise efficiencies, deliver holistic solutions and share risks**
 - **30 people p.a. to voluntary or paid work placements through the Pathways project**
 - **Explore opportunities for new development via Single Conversation and Total Place**

Housing Partnership members

Arlene Kersley – Rural Housing Enabler CCB

Rupert Reeve – Drewette Neate

Sean Bates – Renaissance Habitat

Heather Bowman - Sovereign Housing Association

Cllr Alan Law

Cllr Paul Bryant

Cllr Roger Hunneman

Bryan Lyttle - Planning and Transport Policy Manager

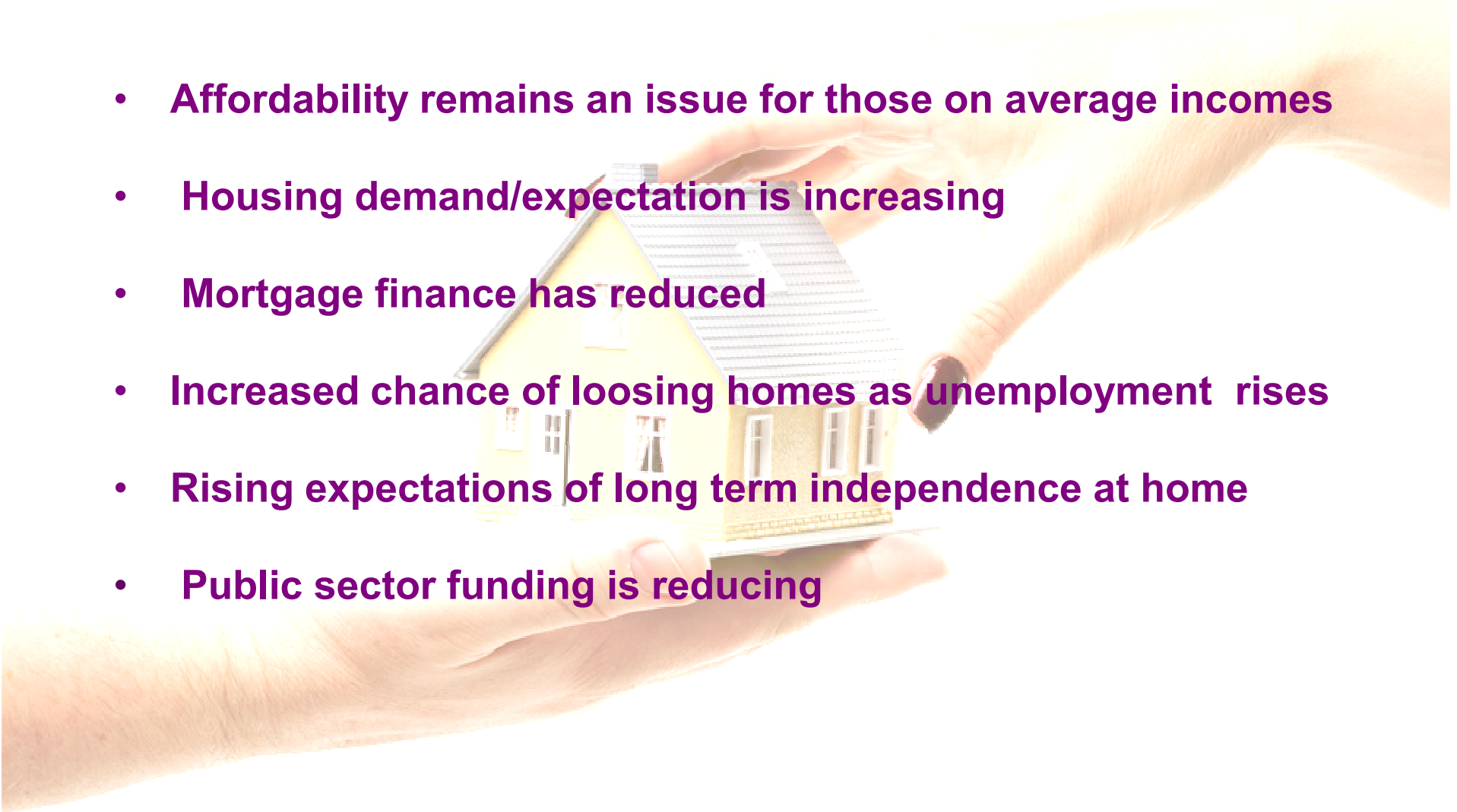
West Berkshire Housing Management Team



- **Reviewing the effectiveness of the partnership**
- **Working together to gain a better understanding of the issues**
- **A new Housing Strategy for the district**
- **Action planning**
- **There have been challenges**

some familiar and some new.....



- 
- **Affordability remains an issue for those on average incomes**
 - **Housing demand/expectation is increasing**
 - **Mortgage finance has reduced**
 - **Increased chance of losing homes as unemployment rises**
 - **Rising expectations of long term independence at home**
 - **Public sector funding is reducing**

- **More about our partners contribution to delivery and how we work together to pool resources**
 - **Options for promoting future development through the partnership**
 - **Rural landowners**
 - **Private sector**
 - **RSLs**
 - **Single Conversation**
 - **Total Place**
- 

- **More engagement with the district and beyond**

**Housing Survey
Landowners event**

- **Adopt the new Housing Strategy and action plan**
- **A focus on rural communities, energy efficiency and private sector**
- **Look for other opportunities**
- **Continue to challenge**



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Title of Report:	Empty Homes Strategy	Item 5
Report to be considered by:	Stronger Communities Select Committee	
Date of Meeting:	12 May 2010	

Purpose of Report: **The Stronger Communities Select Committee wishes to review the progress of the Empty Homes Strategy. This report sets out baseline information to inform the review.**

Recommended Action: **None**

Reason for decision to be taken: N/A

Other options considered: N/A

Key background documentation: Empty Homes Strategy 2008 - 2011, adopted 6th July 2008

The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the following Council Plan Priority(ies):

- CPP1 – Support our communities through the economic recession** – to alleviate the impact on different communities and individuals who find themselves out of work and/or disadvantaged
- CPP2 – Raise levels of educational achievement** – improving school performance levels
- CPP3 – Reduce West Berkshire’s carbon footprint** – to reduce CO₂ emissions in West Berkshire and contribute to waste management, green travel, transportation and energy efficiency

The proposals will also help achieve the following Council Plan Theme(s):

- CPT1 - Better Roads and Transport**
- CPT2 - Thriving Town Centres**
- CPT3 - Affordable Housing**
- CPT4 - High Quality Planning**
- CPT5 - Cleaner and Greener**
- CPT6 - Vibrant Villages**
- CPT7 - Safer and Stronger Communities**
- CPT8 - A Healthier Life**
- CPT9 - Successful Schools and Learning**
- CPT10 - Promoting Independence**
- CPT11 - Protecting Vulnerable People**
- CPT12 - Including Everyone**
- CPT13 - Value for Money**
- CPT14 - Effective People**
- CPT15 - Putting Customers First**
- CPT16 - Excellent Performance Management**

The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the above Council Plan Priorities and Themes by:

The Empty Homes Strategy seeks to bring empty homes back into use. Empty Homes can be associated with anti-social behaviour, vandalism and crime, therefore, bringing them back into use can make neighbourhoods safer. Similarly, empty homes make best use of existing stock and could be used to accommodate people in housing need.

Portfolio Member Details	
Name & Telephone No.:	Councillor Alan Law - Tel (01491) 873614
E-mail Address:	alaw@westberks.gov.uk
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	

Contact Officer Details	
Name:	Mel Brain
Job Title:	Housing Strategy Manager
Tel. No.:	01635 519403
E-mail Address:	mbrain@westberks.gov.uk

Implications

Policy: The Council's approach to empty homes is set out in the Empty Homes Strategy 2008-2011. This report provides baseline information to enable the Stronger Select Committee to conduct a review of the Council's approach to empty homes.

Financial: This report has no direct financial implications which have not be previously agreed.
If there are any financial implications contained within this report this section **must** be signed off by a West Berkshire Group Accountant. Please note that the report cannot be accepted by Policy and Communication unless this action has been undertaken.

Personnel: N/A

Legal/Procurement: N/A

Property: N/A

Risk Management: N/A

Equalities Impact Assessment: N/A as this report is not proposing a new policy.
For advice please contact Principal Policy Officer (Equalities) on Ext. 2441.

Corporate Board's Recommendation: to be completed after the Corporate Board meeting

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Council adopted an Empty Homes Strategy 2008-2011 in July 2008. Prior to this, there had been no coordinated approach to tackling the issue of empty homes, and no targeted work undertaken since the ending of a Sovereign-funded secondment in 2002/03. The secondment brought 22 properties back into use between 2000/01 and 2002/03
- 1.2 The purpose of the Empty Homes Strategy is to set out the actions and incentives that the Council will use to encourage and enforce empty homes back into occupation. The principle is to bring the home back into use, but the focus is not necessarily on use as affordable housing: this is seen as a potential beneficial by-product of the overall approach
- 1.3 The Council's approach focuses on working with owners of empty homes to encourage them to bring their dwelling back into use. The financial assistance (Empty Home Grants, Flexible Empty Home Loans or a combination of the two) is an aid to doing this but all options will be explored with owners, including selling the property, renting it privately or even refurbishing it and moving in themselves. Where encouragement has not worked, the Empty Homes Strategy will consider whether enforcement action is appropriate
- 1.4 In 2009-10, 57 homes had been bought back into use using the BVPI definition. Of these, 43 had been empty for less than 6 months and were bought back into use via the Council's Threshold Loan, and the remaining 14 were bought back into use via direct intervention through the Empty Homes Strategy and are dwellings which have been empty for six months or longer.

2. Conclusion

- 2.1 Bringing empty homes back into use requires detailed work with individual owners and a good deal of patience. The Council's first approach is to use encouragement, offering advice on renting, selling, and renovating of homes, trying to demonstrate the benefits that this will bring to the owner. Where this does not work, the Empty Homes Strategy commits the Council to considering enforcement action, but national guidance on this approach is clear that the Council must be able to demonstrate the steps it has taken to work with owners prior to enforcement. It can take many months before an outcome is seen.
- 2.2 The implementation of the Strategy is beginning to see a degree of success and the Empty Homes Panel, set up to deal with the most persistent empty home owners, should build upon this. A successful enforcement action through the EDMO route would send a strong message to other owners of empty homes within West Berkshire

Executive Report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Council adopted an Empty Homes Strategy 2008-2011 in July 2008. Prior to this, there had been no coordinated approach to tackling the issue of empty homes, and no targeted work undertaken since the ending of a Sovereign-funded secondment in 2002/03. The secondment brought 22 properties back into use between 2000/01 and 2002/03.
- 1.2 The Council made a capital allocation of £75,000 per annum to support the implementation of the Empty Homes Strategy with a 0.5 FTE post assigned to it. The post was accommodated from within the existing team structure and the salary is capitalised, paid from within the capital allocation. The Capital Programme shows the funding ending from 2014/15 onwards.

2. Purpose of the Empty Homes Strategy

- 2.1 Empty homes are a wasted resource. Reducing the number of empty homes can ease pressure on the housing stock and reduce the necessity to develop Greenfield land. It also reduces the opportunities for crime, vandalism, squatting, arson and other anti-social behaviour, which can result in neighbouring properties becoming devalued (the average decrease in property value for homes next to, or near, an empty property, is estimated to be around 10%). Refurbishment of existing property is also greener than new build: newbuild properties give rise to 50 tonnes of CO² per house whilst refurbishment is just 15 tonnes.
- 2.2 The purpose of the Empty Homes Strategy is to set out the actions and incentives that the Council will use to encourage and enforce empty homes back into occupation. The principle is to bring the home back into use, but the focus is not necessarily on use as affordable housing: this is seen as a potential beneficial by-product of the overall approach.
- 2.3 The Empty Homes Strategy is for residential dwellings only, as the enforcement actions available are only applicable in this way. Other empty property within the district can be addressed through the Council's strategic housing enabling role, working with developers and RSLs, where planning policy permits.

3. Extent of the Problem in West Berkshire

- 3.1 According to the Private Sector House Condition Survey 2008, 85% of stock in West Berkshire is privately owned (72% owner-occupied and 13% privately rented), which is slightly higher than the national average of 82% (*English House Condition Survey 2005*). The remaining 15% is Housing Association accommodation.
- 3.2 Council Tax records show that as of 1st April 2010, there were 1419 empty dwellings, excluding second homes, within the district, of which 407 had been empty for longer than 6 months. This represents approximately 2.26% of the overall housing stock. Appendix A sets out the profile of empty properties: second homes have been included for information only.

3.3 The number of empty homes fluctuates on a daily basis due to changes in occupation of dwellings. There are a number of reasons, as can be seen in Appendix A, for homes becoming empty, including properties on the market for sale and those that are empty whilst renovation works are undertaken. For the purpose of the Empty Homes Strategy, the focus is on long-term empty homes i.e. those that have been empty for 6 months or longer. This represents approximately 0.65% of the overall housing stock and has decreased from 583 as at 1st April 2008.

4. How Does the Empty Homes Strategy Work?

4.1 The Empty Homes Officer requests regular lists from Council Tax providing details of empty homes and their owners. Letters are then sent to these owners, which become progressively stronger in their wording. Reference is made to the financial assistance that is available but also refers to the enforcement powers that are available to the Council.

4.2 The financial assistance that is currently available is as follows:

* **Empty Homes Grant** – a grant of up to £20,000 towards the cost of works to bring the property up to a lettable condition in return for up to 5 years nomination rights for applicants registered on the Council’s Common Housing Register. The requirement to match-fund the grant was removed and a sliding scale of nomination rights according to the amount of grant awarded introduced in March 2009

* **Empty Home Flexible Loan** – a loan up to the value of the lesser of the cost of works or two-thirds of the value of the property. Further advances and stage payments are available if the property increases in value as the works progress. The loan is for a fixed term of five years after which it must be repaid, either by re-mortgaging or by selling the property. However, during the term of the loan, the owner can choose to make regular, ad-hoc or no repayments. The owner is not required to offer nomination rights.

* A **Combination** of an Empty Homes Grant and an Empty Homes Loan – owners of empty homes can combine grants with loans to achieve the best solution for them. In this case, the nomination rights are required in accordance with the Empty Homes grant requirements.

4.3 In all cases, a land charge is placed against the property for the period of the loan or the nomination period.

4.4 The Council’s approach focuses on working with owners of empty homes to encourage them to bring their dwelling back into use. The financial assistance is an aid to doing this but all options will be explored with owners, including selling the property, renting it privately or even refurbishing it and moving in themselves. The Council’s Threshold Loan Scheme is also promoted.

4.5 Many owners are resistant to the Council’s approaches. Some owners feel that they should not have to bring the home back into use as they pay full Council Tax, some claim they are taking action to try and hold off further approaches from the Council and some refuse point blank to engage with us. Ultimately, where encouragement fails to work, enforcement action is an option. This is considered in more detail below.

5. Enforcement Action

- 5.1 Where encouragement has not worked, the Empty Homes Strategy will consider whether enforcement action is appropriate. There is a range of legislation which can be used against empty homes, for example, powers held by Building Control, Environmental Health and Planning. These are intended to deal with specific nuisance issues or dangerous structures.
- 5.2 Where a local authority has undertaken works in default under their powers and registered a charge against the dwelling in respect of the costs, it is possible to enforce sale of a dwelling. This approach can be used to get empty dwellings back into use.
- 5.3 It is also possible for the public to request disposal of publicly-owned property (Public Request to Order Disposal) if the authority cannot come up with a reasonable reason for keeping the property empty. Some public property, notably dwellings owned by the NHS and MOD, are excluded, however, dwellings owned by RSLs are included.
- 5.4 The Housing 2004 introduced Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO). The Act introduces two types of management order in relation to empty dwellings – “interim EDMOs” and “final EDMOs”. The purpose of an interim EDMO is to enable a Local Housing Authority to take steps to secure occupation of an empty dwelling with the consent of the owner. A final EDMO is made in succession to an interim EDMO (or a previous final EDMO) for the purpose of securing that a dwelling becomes and remains occupied, whether or not the owner of the dwelling consents (CLG, July 2006).
- 5.5 EDMO’s must be authorised by the Residential Property Tribunal (RPT) and the RPT will need to be satisfied that:
- * the dwelling has been wholly unoccupied for at least 6 months (or such longer period as may be prescribed);
 - * there is no reasonable prospect of it becoming occupied in the near future
 - * that, if an interim EDMO is made, there is a reasonable prospect that it will become occupied
- 5.6 In addition, the Council must demonstrate that any prescribed requirements are complied with and that the property does not fall within an exempt category. The Council will need to demonstrate that they have attempted (and documented) to bring the dwelling back into occupation through the Empty Homes Strategy and by offering a range of services and incentives to owners. The Council must also undertake a balancing exercise, taking into account the proprietor’s rights and the interests of the wider community.
- 5.7 It is expected that relevant costs in association with an EDMO, including any costs for the purpose of securing occupation, proper management of the dwelling and administrative costs, are recovered from the rent, with any balance of rent or payments after deductions, paid to the proprietor. The level of work required to apply and receive approval for an EDMO is likely to be very intensive.

6. Progress to Date

- 6.1 The Empty Homes Strategy was adopted in July 2008. This was a new area of work for the team and it quickly became apparent that additional training and robust procedures needed to be developed to ensure that the Strategy was fully implemented. The first year of implementation focused on putting procedures in place, training staff and refining processes based on learning. It should be noted however, that owners of empty homes were contacted and a proactive approach to dealing with empty home owners was adopted during this time.
- 6.2 A further issue was the recording and maintenance of information about actions that had been taken. Cross-referencing lists against Council Tax data and ensuring up-to-date records are maintained in an easily accessible format has proved problematic. The Council's Housing Assistance database (FLARE) has now been amended to incorporate empty homes work, including award of financial assistance and has been operational since March 2010.
- 6.3 The Empty Homes Strategy adopted the former BVPI definition for monitoring purposes. This definition is "*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*". It should be noted that this definition does not require dwellings to have been vacant for six months or longer and therefore monitoring includes the use of the Threshold Loan Scheme for homes that have been vacant for less than six months.
- 6.4 The target within the Empty Homes Strategy was to bring 18 homes back into use every year. It was intended that at least four of the empty homes would be bought back into use via grant funding.
- 6.5 The target reflected a Best Value annual improvement of 2.5% of the total long-term empty stock, on the advice of the Empty Homes Agency. If the same target was applied to the current number of long-term empties (currently 407), the target would be 10 dwellings.
- 6.6 In 2009-10, 57 homes had been bought back into use using the BVPI definition outlined above.
- 6.7 Of these, 43 have been bought back into use via the Threshold Loan Scheme (TLS) (i.e. the Council has provided a month rent in advance and/or a rent deposit guarantee, to facilitate access to the private rented sector for households who are on low or no income, and who are homeless or threatened with homelessness). Units bought into use this way are only counted if they are empty prior to the TLS tenant moving in and are not counted more than once (i.e. if they have previously had a TLS tenant, then become empty, and then another TLS tenant moves in, they will not be counted). The total given in 6.6 above excludes the Q4 figures for the Threshold Loan scheme and would therefore rise if these were included.
- 6.8 The remaining 14 units have been bought back into use via direct intervention through the Empty Homes Strategy and are dwellings which have been empty for six months or longer. The numbers included are those properties where we have sent more than one empty homes letter and/or had direct discussion with the home owner. Homes that have been returned into use following the first empty homes letter have not been counted, but this would increase the total number. In all

instances, the owner has taken action to bring the property back into use without financial assistance from the Council.

7. Empty Homes Panel

- 7.1 Work is ongoing with owners and the list of empty properties is reviewed regularly. There is now a small core of empty properties, all of which have been empty for a considerable length of time (over 10 years) where the owners are resisting the advice and financial assistance on offer. A cross-service Empty Homes Panel has been established and is meeting in May 2010. Initially eight of the most difficult cases will be presented to the Panel to ensure that we have considered all options available to us prior to considering whether enforcement action (i.e. an Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) or use of other powers) is appropriate.
- 7.2 It is anticipated that the capital funding made available for empty homes grants may also be used to support the enforcement action against those owners who consistently fail to co-operate or to bring their empty homes back into use

8. Conclusions

- 8.1 Bringing empty homes back into use requires detailed work with individual owners and a good deal of patience. The Council's first approach is to use encouragement, offering advice on renting, selling, and renovating of homes, trying to demonstrate the benefits that this will bring to the owner. Where this does not work, the Empty Homes Strategy commits the Council to considering enforcement action, but national guidance on this approach is clear that the Council must be able to demonstrate the steps it has taken to work with owners prior to enforcement. It can take many months before an outcome is seen.
- 8.2 The implementation of the Strategy is beginning to see a degree of success and the Empty Homes Panel, set up to deal with the most persistent empty home owners, should build upon this. A successful enforcement action through the EDMO route would send a strong message to other owners of empty homes within West Berkshire.

Appendices

Appendix A - Profile of Empty Properties in West Berkshire as at 1st April 2010

Consultees

Local Stakeholders:

Officers Consulted: Maureen Sheridan – Housing Strategy Support Officer
June Graves – Head of Housing & Performance

Trade Union:

Appendix A: Profile of Empty Properties in West Berkshire as at 1st April 2010

Long term empty (more than 6 months)			407
Empty furnished let			33
Exempt empty property (for reason stated)			
CLASS	L	Re-Possessed Property	8
CLASS	A1	Repairs Completed	2
CLASS	B	Empty / Charity	3
CLASS	A2	Repairs Incomplete	90
CLASS	E	Owner in Hospital	13
CLASS	I	Owner in Care	53
CLASS	J	Owner away - Carer	5
CLASS	R	Empty Caravan Pitch - moorings	70
CLASS	D	Owner in Prison	1
		Owner Deceased Awaiting	
CLASS	F1	Probate	140
CLASS	H	Unoccupied Religious Property	2
CLASS	C	Empty & Unfurnished	535
CLASS	A3	Demolished property	4
		Owner Deceased Probate	
CLASS	F2	granted	31
CLASS	G	Occupation prohibited	21
CLASS	Q	Empty / Bankrupt	1
Second homes			486
Second home (due to employment conditions)			12

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Title of Report:	Scrutiny review into the performance of schools in West Berkshire	Item 6
Report to be considered by:	Stronger Communities Select Committee	
Date of Meeting:	12 May 2010	

Purpose of Report: To outline the results of the investigation into the performance of schools in West Berkshire.

Recommended Action: That the Stronger Communities Select Committee approves the report for the endorsement of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission.

Stronger Communities Select Committee Chairman	
Name & Telephone No.:	Councillor Irene Neill – Tel (0118) 9712671
E-mail Address:	ineill@westberks.gov.uk
Contact Officer Details	
Name:	David Lowe
Job Title:	Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager
Tel. No.:	01635 519817
E-mail Address:	dlowe@westberks.gov.uk

Executive Report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 During its meeting of 24 March 2009, the (then) Overview and Scrutiny Commission approved a request from Councillor Alan Macro for a review into schools' performance within the district. The request was prompted by a concern that a number of schools were in 'special measures' or the 'National Challenge' scheme.
- 1.2 The Commission agreed to add this item to the work programme and at its meeting of 16 June 2009 the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission agreed that the matter should be examined by the Stronger Communities Select Committee.
- 1.3 The Stronger Communities Select Committee examined the subject during its meeting on the 5th October 2009 and considered its recommendations on the 11th November 2009.
- 1.4 This report outlines the Terms of Reference of the review, provides background and context and presents the Select Committee's findings and recommendations.

2. Terms of Reference

- 2.1 The Terms of Reference for the Select Committee were to conduct a review into poor performance of schools in West Berkshire and, in particular:
 - The background and context
 - Where and why schools are not reaching the required standard
 - Consider what is being done and can be done further to improve schools' performance
 - Report to the Executive with recommendations for changes in the current arrangements

3. Background and context

General

- 3.1 Expectations of school performance and the thresholds they are expected to exceed have been rising continually. Whilst many schools in West Berkshire have steadily improved performance, some schools have not. At the time that consideration of the subject was requested, two secondary schools were in the National Challenge to improve GCSE standards; and one primary and one secondary school were subject to special measures following Ofsted inspections in December 2008.

National challenge

- 3.2 Schools in the National Challenge are judged against a single measure – the percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more GCSE grades at A*-C including English and maths against a national floor target of 30%. National Challenge started in August 2007 when the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) announced a new floor target of 30% minimum.

3.3 The National Challenge programme provides a range of support and challenge to schools negotiated through a National Challenge Adviser (NCA) and is monitored by the DCSF through a Local National Challenge Board. Additional funding is provided through a Standards Fund Grant to each school, scaled according to the specific programme for the school. Where schools in National Challenge fail to make progress, the Local Authority is required to consider and implement more radical structural change. This can include replacement of the school with a National Challenge Trust or academy; or compulsory federation of the school with a more successful one.

Special measures

3.4 The thresholds on school performance have risen successively over recent years. In addition, the Ofsted inspection criteria have been made progressively more demanding. Significant changes to the Ofsted criteria made in September 2005, 2008 and 2009 have placed much higher expectations on schools. In general terms, a level of performance that would have been judged 'good' five years ago would now only achieve 'satisfactory'. The changes are:

- New inspection framework introduced in September 2005 with more demanding criteria plus expectations about the rigor of school self-evaluation.
- Increased focus on inspection judgments driven by attainment data. Below par performance in a single year is enough to trigger being put in an Ofsted category.
- New guidance to inspectors in Autumn 2008 setting out higher expectations for schools to improve standards to at least in line with the national trend to get a 'good' judgment on standards overall.
- New guidance to inspectors from September 2008 that those schools needing to improve must be put in special measures if the necessary improvement is likely to take longer than 12 months to achieve

3.5 The range of measures used to judge school performance has been broadened considerably. These include measures of the progress of all pupils as well as their age-related attainment. Schools are now required to set progress targets for all children and there is an increasingly sharp focus on the attainment of particular vulnerable groups. Whereas the core subjects of English and mathematics used to be judged separately, they are now measured together with an expectation that as many pupils as possible attain the required level in both subjects.

3.6 After an inspection of a school, Ofsted publishes a report on the school on its website. In addition to written comments on a number of areas, schools are assessed on each area and overall on a 4-point scale: 1 (Outstanding), 2 (Good), 3 (Satisfactory) and 4 (Inadequate). Schools rated Outstanding or Good might not be inspected again for five years, while schools judged less favourably are inspected more frequently, and may receive little or no notice of inspection visits.

3.7 Sometimes a school is placed into 'special measures' if it is judged as 'inadequate' (Grade 4) in one or more areas and if the inspectors have decided it does not have the capacity to improve without additional help. Schools placed into special measures receive intensive support from local authorities, additional funding and resourcing, and frequent reappraisal from Ofsted until the school is no longer deemed to be failing. Furthermore, the senior managers and teaching staff can be dismissed and the governing body may be replaced by an appointed Interim

Executive Board (IEB). Schools which are failing but where inspectors consider there is capacity to improve are given a Notice to Improve.

Other factors

3.8 School leaders and governors have also been required to manage a wide range of other issues and initiatives over the last five years. These include:

- Every Child Matters agenda launched from 2005 with 5 outcome areas to be judged against.
- Pupil progress targets introduced from 2006. Expectations of 2 levels of progress for every pupil over each key stage means that all teaching needs to be of high quality in every year group. Nowhere for weaker teachers to be placed to minimize impact.
- New national “floor targets” introduced by National Strategies. KS2 level 4+ 65% in English and maths. GCSE 25% 5+ A*-C.
- Workforce reform regulations introduced requiring arrangements to be made to relieve teachers of 25 routine tasks and move these into a revised arrangement for school support staff. There is also a requirement to restructure leadership and management posts within new pay system for management responsibilities. New statutory requirements on performance management of staff.
- Full Core Offer for Extended Schools to be delivered by 2010.
- Healthy Schools Standards to be achieved by 2010.
- Financial Management in Schools Standard to be achieved by 2010.
- Higher expectations around safeguarding children.
- Additional responsibilities / regulations around health and safety – Fire Safety, Legionella etc.
- June 2007 introduction of revised floor target for secondary schools of 30% 5+A*-C including English and maths. Launch of National Challenge.
- New duty to promote Community Cohesion inspected from September 2008.
- Impact of demographic change and fluctuating pupil numbers potentially affecting school budgets.

3.9 The position for West Berkshire at the time of review was that John O Gaunt and Trinity schools were in the National Challenge and in Special Measures were John Rankin Primary School and Denefield secondary school. Winchcombe Primary school came out of special measures in June 2009. Speenhamland primary school had a notice to improve and would be re-inspected in the spring of 2010.

4. Methodology

4.1 The review has been conducted by all the Members of the Stronger Communities Select Committee, working with Council officers and staff from schools.

4.2 In addition to the receipt of a comprehensive briefing paper from the Chief Adviser for Schools Improvement the Select Committee held the meetings outlined in the table below.

Srl	Meeting date	Meeting focus
01	5 th October 2009	Evidence presented from the Chief Adviser for Schools Improvement, Children and Young People portfolio holder, Executive Head teachers, School Improvement Partners and National Challenge Advisors to identify the reasons why some schools are in 'Special Measures' or in the 'National Challenge' and identify further measures that could be taken to improve their performance.
02	11 th November 2009	Consideration of review recommendations.

4.3 The minutes from meetings at Srl 01 are shown at Appendix A.

4.4 Evidence was presented from the following:

- (1) Councillor Barbara Alexander, Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People.
- (2) Andy Tubbs, Chief Adviser for Schools Improvement.
- (3) Chris Bryan, National Challenge Adviser.
- (4) Alan Bartlett, School Improvement Partner.
- (5) Maxine Slade, School Improvement Adviser.
- (6) Michael Wheale, Executive Headteacher, John O'Gaunt School.
- (7) Paul Dick, Executive Headteacher, Trinity School and Interim Executive Board Chairman for Winchcombe Primary School.
- (8) Linda Valenti, Executive Headteacher, John Rankin Junior School.

5. Acknowledgements and thanks

5.1 The Chairman and Members of the Committee would like to acknowledge and thank all those who supported and gave evidence to the review.

6. Findings

6.1 The review findings are outlined below.

Performance frameworks and support strategies

- (1) There are three basic essentials that enable good schools to ensure that children & young people achieve well. These are:
 - (a) Strong leadership
 - (b) Good governance
 - (c) Consistently good teaching and learning.

Where any of these 3 key elements are absent or not sufficiently in evidence, there will be underperformance.

- (2) All schools are expected to be semi-autonomous and continually improving institutions. The aim of all schools is to improve to the point of being judged outstanding. Schools are expected to self-evaluate their performance and keep a record of this using a School Evaluation Form. This is used by Ofsted inspectors when visiting a school to

make judgements about the quality of the school; the accuracy of its self-evaluation; and the capacity of the school to improve further.

- (3) The self-evaluation and continuous improvement process is supported by a School Improvement Partner, who works with each school. The SIP (SIP) is required to support and challenge the leadership in the school so that priorities for development are clear and self-evaluation is realistic and accurate. The SIP also has an important role in supporting and advising the governing body with the performance management of the headteacher and agreeing annual statutory targets for pupil attainment and progress. All schools have a statutory allocation of 5 SIP days spread over the year. Schools needing additional support have an extra allocation of days scaled to the need and categorisation of the school. SIPs complete a set of reports over the year which are agreed with the school and then copied to the Chair of Governors.
- (4) Where schools are a cause for concern The Council provides a bespoke package of support agreed with the school. This often includes the deployment of specialist staff from the School Improvement Team; Leading Teachers or Advanced Skills Teachers from other local schools; brokered support from other schools with expertise in a specific area. Each school has a Raising Achievement Plan and the progress made against the plan is monitored through a cycle of School Progress Meetings held every 6 weeks.
- (5) The Education & Inspections Act 2006 gives LAs additional powers of intervention. West Berkshire LA will deploy suitable strategies to secure improvement. Any intervention strategies used will normally be planned and agreed with the school through the Project Team. Where a school is in an OfSTED category the LA support and intervention will have been set out in the LA Statement of Action. However, in extreme cases the LA will use intervention exclusively. The strategies used will be tailored to suit the individual circumstances of the school concerned. The range of strategies available includes the following:

Srl	Reason	Strategy
01	Where governance is weak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placement of additional governors on the existing governing body • Partnering the governing body with the governors of another successful school • Replacement of the governing body by an Interim Executive board • Appointment of a “parent champion”
02	Where standards are low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deployment of national strategy consultants and programmes designed to raise standards. • Additional deployment of ASTs or Leading teachers • Partnering with another school where standards are high • Commissioning of specific support from an external agency

Srl	Reason	Strategy
03	Where leadership and management capacity is low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional mentorship for the existing leadership team • Deployment or secondment of additional senior staff from another school with a proven track record in school improvement • Federation with another successful school • Appointment of an Executive Headteacher
04	Where there is a failure to manage school finances effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional support from the LA Accountancy Service • Suspension of the school's right to a delegated budget
05	Where there is a serious failure in the overall effectiveness of the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federation with a partner school • Merger with another local school • Closure and opening a replacement school through the Fresh Start process. • Permanent closure through school reorganisation.

- (6) Although schools have a high degree of autonomy, since September 2008 each local authority has had increased powers of intervention which can be used where a school is a serious cause for concern. These interventions include:
- (a) Issuing a formal Warning Notice to the Governing Body
 - (b) Placing additional governors on the governing body
 - (c) Replacing the governing body with an Interim Executive Board
 - (d) Requiring a school to federate with a successful school
 - (e) Placing an Executive headteacher in the school to strengthen leadership
 - (f) Closure of the school and replacement with a Trust School or an Academy.
- (7) Since September 2008 the School Improvement Team has introduced a Risk Assessment Grid which all SIPs are required to use with schools in order to monitor and track progress, as well as provide alerts where schools are at a continuing risk of failing to meet national floor targets or do well in an Ofsted Inspection. The outputs from the risk assessments are included within a School Tracking Grid which also includes a running record of school attainment data. Risk Assessments and SIP reports are copied to Chairs of Governors. This has resulted in governors of schools causing concern to be better informed about key priorities and progress being made. This has supported governors in discussions with inspectors.

West Berkshire poor performance – causes

- (8) From an analysis of the current schools in West Berkshire that are either in the National Challenge or in Special Measures the following factors have had a significant influence on underperformance at the time that the judgements about each school were made:

Factor	John O Gaunt	Trinity	Denefield	Winchcombe Primary	John Rankin Junior
Weaknesses in leadership	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Over pre-occupation with other initiatives/ issues	✓		✓		✓
Pressure on pupil numbers / budget deficit	✓	✓			
Weakness in governance		✓	✓	✓	✓
Inconsistent quality of teaching	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Difficulty in recruiting / retaining specialist teachers	✓Esp Maths	✓Esp Maths	✓		✓
Insufficient capacity to improve	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ineffective SIP			✓		

- (9) Whilst there are failings that are common to two or more schools, there is no evidence to suggest that these are systemic. Comment on each of these factors will be provided in subsequent sections.

West Berkshire poor performance – interventions

- (10) The following interventions have been used in West Berkshire schools in order to tackle underperformance and have had a positive impact on the pace and quality of improvement:

Intervention	John O Gaunt	Trinity	Denefield	Winchcombe Primary	John Rankin Junior
Local Authority school improvement review	✓			✓	
Issue of formal advice note or Warning Notice to governing body		✓	✓	✓	
Placement of interim head teacher / recruitment of new head teacher	✓		✓		
Placement of Executive Head from local successful school	✓	✓		✓	✓
Federation with another successful school	Supported by Little Heath	Paired with Kennet			Hard federation with John Rankin Infant
Placement of additional governors	✓		✓		✓
Replacement of the governing body with an IEB		✓		✓	
School Rasing Achievement Plan + programme of LA support	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Appointment of Parent Champions			✓	✓	✓
Replacement of the SIP			From Sept 2008		

Weaknesses in leadership

- (11) There have been both positive and negative experiences of the practise of employing Executive Head Teachers. Appointed by the Local Authority, they act as mentors to the Head Teacher of the failing school, when one is in place. It is for the Executive Head Teacher to manage the school with the assistance of senior staff, the Head Teacher and Assistant Head Teachers. The effectiveness of Executive Head Teachers could be strengthened by the introduction of clearly articulated Terms of Reference. This would clarify to all the extent of their responsibilities and their authority to take decisions.
- (12) Whilst some Head Teachers are recognisably good managers of staff, property, money and other resources, there is sometimes a deficit of the attributes that make good leaders., This could be addressed by development and mentoring. Done correctly, this has the potential to preclude the requirement for later, and more resource intense, interventions.
- (13) To improve succession planning and deepen the pool from which leaders can be drawn, the district could benefit from establishing formal structures to identify and develop those teachers with the potential to advance to senior positions. With the proper focus, a structured programme would also provide to Head Teachers additional expertise and support.

Pre-occupation with other initiatives/issues

- (14) Head Teachers do sometimes become, by necessity, overly involved with the delivery of non-teaching related activities, for example the management of buildings and property. This can have a detrimental impact on managing the improvement of teaching staff. Ofsted have recently published a national report that identifies that too many different educational initiatives have had a negative impact on progress with raising standards. School leaders and governors need to be more resolute in making sure that any development initiative is used carefully.

Pressure on pupil numbers/budget deficit

- (15) As the numbers of pupils decrease, so does the amount of funding available to the school. As the cost of overheads, such as salaries and heating/lighting, is fixed, this can lead to financial pressures that can have an impact on the delivery of teaching. The downward spiral into which schools may descend can be characterised as
 - pupil numbers reduce
 - the related funding decreases causing budget pressures
 - the situation may then contribute to a lowering of educational standards
 - parents consequently seek a places at an alternative schools (for both existing pupils or potential new ones), thereby reducing still further the number of pupils.

The end result is not good for pupils, the school or its teachers.

- (16) Schools do not always have in place robust financial practises. This can contribute to and exacerbate the circumstances arising from reduced pupil numbers. The requirement for schools to meet the *Financial Management in Schools* standard is sound but may prove difficult for some schools to achieve.

Weaknesses in governance

- (17) Governing Bodies select and recruit Head teachers but there is evidence to suggest that they do not always appoint the right calibre of candidate. Whilst it would not necessarily eliminate the risk of inappropriate appointments, training for governors in the selection and recruitment of Head Teachers could go some way to reduce it.
- (18) Although they have a remit to hold Head Teachers to account, governors do not always do so. A professional relationship needs to be developed and maintained to enable this, for which training is provided by the LEA's Governor Support Team. Specific training is also available for Chairs of Governors. As the requirement for training is not mandated, the take up of the training packages offered is not uniform and could be increased. This would reduce the potential for weakness.
- (19) It is not clear the extent to which governors understand the importance of the operation of a robust performance management framework. Training and guidance in the application of a framework to measure the effectiveness of and for the holding to account of Head Teachers may address this weakness.
- (20) Governor training is evaluated by feedback forms completed by those attending, the majority of which is positive. Whilst this evaluates the delivery of the training, it does not necessarily assess its effectiveness in application.

Inconsistent quality of teaching

- (21) Regrettably, Head Teachers are sometimes placed in the position of having to make the unenviable choice of appointing a poor teacher or no teacher at all. Whilst the appointment of a poor teacher may be acknowledged to be the 'least worst' option in some cases, it is not always clear that Head Teachers are equipped to improve or otherwise manage poor performers. This is particularly so of younger Head Teachers who may have limited management experience. There is a clear opportunity for the LEA to provide training and guidance to help address this.

Difficulty in recruiting/retaining specialist teachers

- (22) Across the South East of England, most schools are struggling to recruit and retain teachers in specialist subjects such as science or mathematics. This is especially so in struggling schools and contributes to the cycle of decline outlined at finding (15).

- (23) Although some incentives exist, there is an opportunity through the School Funding Forum to attract stronger candidates. Should an initiative be developed, schools would need to give their agreement.
- (24) Although not widely used, external training is available to retrain teachers from their existing subjects to those for which there is a shortage. It is not clear whether candidates for retraining are being actively sought or encouraged.

Insufficient capacity to improve

- (25) Whilst the pressure on Head Teachers is articulated in finding (14), there is a wider pressure on capacity at other points in schools. This is felt at middle management and team leader level, with insufficient time and energy being available to create the space necessary to make improvements.

Effectiveness of School Improvement Partners

- (26) School Improvement Partners are well regarded, generally effective and are working at full capacity. To avoid any further decreases in educational standards in the district current resource levels should be maintained.
- (27) There has been one isolated episode where the performance of the SIP contributed to a school not making the progress it should. This was addressed through the Council's performance management framework and the individual concerned is no longer employed by the authority.

Standards and Effectiveness Panel

- (28) The Schools Standards and Effectiveness Panel is a small Member group that conducts visits to schools to assess performance. Members of the Panel visit all schools at least once in a rolling 4 year programme, with particular attention being paid to those schools expressing most cause for concern, for example through poor Ofsted reports.
- (29) Anecdotal feedback on the operation of the Panel is good but this is not measured against objective criteria. Providing its worth can be demonstrated, there may be scope to allow the Panel to make a greater contribution to improving schools' performance.
- (30) Members of the panel operate to a standard structure when carrying out visits and produce reports on their completion. The reports are not currently considered by any democratic body within the Council, although previously they were received by the Education/Children and Young People Committee.

7. Recommendations arising from the review

7.1 The recommendations arising from the review are outlined in the sections below.

Leadership

- (1) When appointing an Executive Head, the Chief Adviser for School Improvement should ensure that there are clear Terms of Reference and these are agreed, widely communicated and understood by all those working to improve the performance of the school.
- (2) The Chief Adviser for School Improvement should scope, develop and deliver a programme of support and mentoring to improve the leadership qualities of Head Teachers. The programme might include elements that address:
 - Developing people — Enabling teachers and other staff to do their jobs effectively, offering intellectual support and stimulation to improve the work, and providing models of practice and support.
 - Setting directions for the organisation — Developing shared goals, monitoring organisational performance, and promoting effective communication.
 - Redesigning the organisation — Creating a productive school culture, modifying organisational structures that undermine the work, and building collaborative processes.
- (3) Working with Head teachers, the Chief Adviser for School Improvement should scope, develop and deliver a leadership programme for those teachers with the ambition and potential to be future leaders. The programme might include elements that address:
 - Analytical Thinking
 - Conceptual Thinking
 - Curiosity and Eagerness to Learn
 - Self awareness
 - Resilience and Emotional Maturity
 - Integrity
 - Personal Drive
 - Holding people to account / Performance management
 - Developing Others
 - Inspiring Others
 - Impact on Others
 - Relating to Others
 - Collaboration

School Improvement Advisers should work with Head Teachers to identify teachers with the ambition and potential to be future leaders. Once identified, these teachers should be supported to complete the programme outlined above.

Pupil numbers and budget management

- (4) The Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People should ensure with the Schools Forum, that all schools within the district have either the pupil numbers or financial support to ensure that they are sufficiently viable to maintain the levels of performance required by national assessment frameworks.
- (5) Working with Head Teachers, the Head of Education should establish measures to ensure that all schools have appropriate financial management structures in place. These should be in line with the principles outlined in the *Financial Management in Schools Standard*. Appropriate support should be made available and offered to schools to assist them in meeting and maintaining the standards required.

Governance

- (6) The School & Governor Support Manager should establish an appropriate training programme that will equip school governors with the requisite skills to select, recruit and retain the appropriate calibre of Head Teacher and manage their performance effectively. Skills might include
 - Attracting the right candidates
 - Objectively assessing skills and competencies
 - Making the right choices
 - Using pupil data to oversee school performance
 - Using the performance management framework to ensure that heads are effective and accountable
- (7) To increase the competence of Chairs of Governors to effectively performance manage Head Teachers, the Chief Adviser for School Improvement should establish measures that will allow him to understand the percentage of Chairs that have attended the LA training on the subject. Once a baseline has been established, targets should be set to raise the numbers overall that have completed the training.

To support Chairs of Governors, the training should be opened up to all governors.
- (8) School & Governor Support Manager should establish objective measures to assess the effectiveness of training provided to governors. This should go beyond the existing measures of satisfaction with the training and should assess its outcomes.
- (9) In situations where schools are causing concern regarding any aspect of performance or management, School and Governor Services should provide additional mandatory training for the governing body focusing on the need to raise standards or improve leadership and management within the school. The Chief Adviser should put a process in place to ensure that where a governing body refuses to participate positively in

such training, alternative governance arrangements are considered for the school.

Teaching standards

- (10) The Chief Adviser for School Improvement in conjunction with the HR Service, should develop and deliver an appropriate training programme to provide Head Teachers with the requisite skills they need to effectively manage those teachers whose performance does not meet required standards. The content might include:
- The setting of appropriate targets
 - Monitoring progress
 - Addressing failures to achieve.

Specialist teachers

- (11) Discuss proposals with the School Funding Forum regarding appropriate incentives to recruit and retain specialist teachers.
- (12) Working with Head Teachers, the Chief Adviser for School Improvement should establish a mechanism to identify those teachers who may be willing and have the potential to retrain to teach subjects for which teachers are in short supply. Once identified, teachers should be encouraged, enabled, allowed and supported to complete their retraining. Safeguards should be developed to ensure that the LA and schools receive an appropriate return on the investment they have made in those retraining.

Capacity for improvement

- (13) The Chief Adviser for School Improvement should discuss with the School Funding Forum proposals to revise the school funding formula which increase the capacity for headteachers to focus on raising standards of teaching and learning. This might be achieved through expanding the capacity of School Business Managers.

School Improvement Partners

- (14) The Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People should provide a commitment that resource levels for School Improvement are maintained at least at existing levels.

Standards and effectiveness panel

- (15) The Chief Adviser for School Improvement should establish measures to objectively assess the effectiveness of the Standards and Effectiveness Panel. Should effectiveness be demonstrated then, working with the Head of Policy and Communication, a mechanism should be established to ensure that any activity, reports and recommendations arising from the work of the Panel are received by the Council through appropriate democratic structures.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1 Children and young people have one chance at an education which must be as good as it possibly can be. It is therefore vital to tackle underperformance in schools now and guard against it for the future. However, it is also important to have processes in place to intervene early and prevent the education of children and young people suffering.
- 8.2 There is much good work being done to achieve and maintain high educational attainment standards but where it is not action should be taken to address the causes. If adopted, the actions outlined in this report should help to ensure that the children of West Berkshire receive the start in life that they deserve.

9. Recommendation for the Stronger Communities Select Committee

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Stronger Communities Select Committee agrees or, if necessary, amends the recommendations outlined in Section 7 for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission.

Appendices

Appendix A – Minutes of the task group meeting held on 5 October 2009

Appendix B – Minutes of the task group meeting held on 11 November 2009

EXTRACT OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 OCTOBER 2009

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

Also present: Councillor Brian Bedwell, Councillor Barbara Alexander, Andy Tubbs (Chief Advisor for School Improvement), Sam Shepherd (Economic Development Officer), Andrew Breavington (School Improvement Advisor), Chris Bryan (National Challenge Advisor), Alan Bartlett (School Improvement Partners), Michael Wheale (Executive Headteacher, John O'Gaunt School), Paul Dick (Executive Headteacher, Trinity School and Interim Executive Board Chairman for Winchcombe Primary School), Linda Valenti (Executive Headteacher, John Rankin Junior School), Charlotte Wilson (Associate Headteacher, Trinity School), Neil Spurdell (Headteacher, John O'Gaunt School) and one member of the press.

PART I

15. SCHOOLS' STANDARDS REVIEW

Andy Tubbs gave an overview of the criteria for schools in National Challenge which were, those judged against the percentage of pupils gaining five or more GSCE grades at A*-C including English and maths. National Challenge started in June 2007 when the Department of Children Schools and Families announced a new floor target of 30% minimum. Andy Tubbs indicated there were two West Berkshire schools in National Challenge (John O'Gaunt and Trinity).

Andy Tubbs highlighted the criteria for schools in Special Measures which were, those judged by OFSTED as not providing an acceptable standard of education against a range of measures in the Framework for School Inspection. Andy Tubbs indicated there were two West Berkshire schools in Special Measures (John Rankin Junior and Deanefield).

Andy Tubbs drew attention to the fact that there were rising expectations on school performance and an equally increasing number of demands on schools to balance in-class time and overall school management. The Council had provided ongoing support for schools in many different forms but once a school is in National Challenge or Special Measures, powers the Council could enact include:

- Issuing a formal Warning Notice to the governing body
- Placing additional governors on the governing body
- Replacing the governing body with an Interim Executive Board
- Withdrawal of the delegated budget
- Requiring a school to federate with a successful school
- Placing an Executive head teacher in the school to strengthen leadership
- Closure of the school and replacement with a Trust School or an Academy.

Andy Tubbs highlighted that the most important factors in a successful school were strong leadership, good governance and consistently high quality of teaching and learning. Andy Tubbs indicated that weaknesses in leadership had been, among

other factors, a prime cause of underperformance in struggling West Berkshire schools. Andy Tubbs drew attention to the high percentages seen in categorising West Berkshire schools and explained that comparison with similar local authorities might be misleading because the number of schools in West Berkshire were comparatively low.

Councillor Barbara Alexander added to the presentation by saying that poor results might be explained by certain cohorts. Councillor Barbara Alexander flagged up that parental concern could influence the quality of students that local authority schools receive and that the press could be responsible for influencing parental confidence. Councillor Barbara Alexander discussed the Standards and Effectiveness Panel and suggested it be given more powers to intervene in a school earlier (i.e. before they are placed in a category) and revising the Panel's Terms of Reference might assist this. Councillor Irene Neill supported Councillor Barbara Alexander's comments.

Alan Bartlett said that a School Improvement Partner only had limited time to work with a school to enact improvement and this could at times come too late to assist certain cohorts. Chris Bryan welcomed the additional funding West Berkshire Council had made available over and above government funding to support struggling schools.

Michael Wheale indicated that strong leadership from the Head Teacher had the biggest impact, particularly because it models for other staff, directs budgets and therefore maintains good teaching staff. Paul Dick suggested that the Council's intervention powers could be used earlier to prevent schools being categorised and advocated Interim Executive Boards as a method. Paul Dick stated that at times too many people could be involved in school improvement.

Linda Valenti said school improvement should focus on what the school did well and build on the strengths through a tailored approach. School Improvement Partners were said to be a vital part of the picture.

Andrew Breavington raised the need to grow local leaders in West Berkshire schools so succession planning was more successful.

Councillor Irene Neill queried the experience of Executive Head Teachers. Linda Valenti said the partnership model worked well but added that teaming up with other schools should not just be over a problem and could be encouraged on an ongoing basis. Chris Bryan agreed that it was important that schools did not become isolated and added that links with universities were crucial for attracting graduates. Michael Wheale indicated that the Executive Head Teacher approach did not work too well in John O'Gaunt as there was a lack of clarity on who held decision making power. Michael added that affordable levels of housing were a significant factor in securing good teachers in this area.

Councillor Irene Neill asked what the impact of the Intensifying Support Programme had been. Andy Tubbs stated that there had been some success in some schools in literacy and numeracy but the picture was complicated and depended on the level of commitment.

Councillor Alan Macro queried how the successful school Head Teachers support the less successful sufficiently, whilst maintaining standards in their own schools. Paul Dick outlined that it was about keeping an eye on the ball but that a Head Teacher's own performance could improve as a result of expanding their experience. Alan Bartlett drew attention to 'Gaining Ground' an initiative that joined schools up nationally and was seeing Denefield join with a school in Cirencester.

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Irene Neill asked Andy Tubbs how soon he would be alerted to a school in trouble and what would help make intervention more timely. Andy Tubbs mentioned that the Council had introduced a new risk assessment procedure so an early warning system should be in place and following this a 'formal advise notice' could be issued to governors to set out concerns ahead of any formal warnings.

Linda Valenti made a plea that interventions of any kind be managed carefully with staff to prevent morale from deteriorating.

Councillor Irene Neill thanked all the officers and guests for attending the meeting and suggested that the Committee met on another day to allow time to consider their recommendations.

Officers and guests departed.

RESOLVED that the Committee would meet on the evening (6pm) of 11th November to consider their recommendations.

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EXTRACT OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE TASK GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11 NOVEMBER 2009

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

Also present: Sam Shepherd (Economic Development Officer).

PART I

18. SCHOOLS' STANDARDS REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS.

Councillor Irene Neill stated that the purpose of the meeting was to determine the Committee's recommendations after the reports and evidence received during its meeting on the 5th October 2009.

Councillor Irene Neill highlighted that the most salient point for the review is children have one chance at an education and this must be as good as it possibly can be. Councillor Irene Neill expressed frustration with the low profile given to the Standards and Effectiveness Panel and suggested that the Panel's concerns go forward as Part II reports to other Councillors and senior officers. Councillors Mollie Lock and Ellen Crumly agreed the Panel's inability to enact change once it identified a problem in a school was frustrating.

Councillor Ellen Crumly stated that the work of the Standards and Effectiveness Panel was valuable in allowing an exchange between Councillors and schools.

The Committee discussed Andy Tubbs' report and recommendations presented on the 5th October 2009 and agreed the following priorities for helping to improve school standards:

1. Where local authority officers and Members have significant concerns about individual schools:
 - a) Ensure that the Standards & Effectiveness Panel has a clear role in monitoring progress and the effectiveness of any early intervention;
 - b) Concerns form a Part II report that goes to the ward member, portfolio holder, shadow portfolio holder, Children and Young People Directorate Management Team and the Chief Executive.
2. Further develop the existing programme of leadership development available across all schools through the local hub of the National College for School Leadership;
3. To improve financial planning and management in schools;
 - a) Bring forward proposals with the School Funding Forum to enhance the provision of School Business Managers in schools in order to enable Head teachers to concentrate more fully on standards and learning;

- b) Strengthen the monitoring of school financial planning and reporting;
- 4. Enhancing the training available to school governors to strengthen their role in monitoring performance;
- 5. Bring forward proposals in consultation with secondary schools to strengthen the recruitment and retention of specialist teachers, especially in mathematics and science.

RESOLVED that Sam Shepherd would circulate minutes with a draft report for the OSMC and draft Terms of Reference for the review of access to public transport.

Agenda Item 7

Title of Report:	Work Programme	Item 7
Report to be considered by:	Stronger Communities Select Committee	
Date of Meeting:	12 May 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.

Stronger Communities Select Committee Chairman	
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Supporting Information

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Members are requested to consider the latest work programme of the Select Committee at Appendix A, prioritise the items listed and discuss any future areas for scrutiny for 2010/11.

Appendices

Appendix A – Stronger Communities Select Committee Work Programme

Consultees

Local Stakeholders: Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission

Officers Consulted: Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager

Trade Union: N/A

APPENDIX 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/09/35	School Standards To assess the performance of schools in the district to understand why some are in 'special measures' or in the 'National Challenge' and identify where possible further measures that could be taken to improve their performance.	Information supplied by, and questioning of, lead officers, and other expert witnesses.	Identify where possible further measures that could be taken to improve performance.	SCSC	Start: 06/07/09 End: 12/05/10	Andy Tubbs - 2726 Education	Councillor Barbara Alexander	Terms of reference for a review approved by the Management Commission.
OSMC/09/36	West Berkshire Partnership sub-partnership briefings To receive a briefing of the work of relevant sub-partnerships.	Information supplied by, and questioning of, lead officers, and external partners.	Information items.	SCSC	Start: 06/07/09 End: 12/05/10		Councillor Graham Pask	As requested by the Select Committee.
OSMC/09/24	Accessibility of public transport Review accessibility 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/10/81	Empty homes To examine the implementation of the Empty Homes Strategy 2008-11 in order to seek to improve the level of affordable housing in the District.	Information supplied by, and questioning of, lead officer via in meeting review	To be identified.	SCSC	Start: 12/05/10 End:	June Graves - 2733 Housing & Performance	Councillor Alan Law	As requested by SCSC on 16th February 2010.
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: 08/07/10 End:	Ian Pearson - 2729 Education	Councillor Barbara Alexander	Retaining small rural schools is currently Council policy.
OSMC/09/46	Implementation of the Social Inclusion Strategy Assessment of the effectiveness of the strategy in addressing the needs of residents most excluded within the district.	Information supplied by, and questioning of, lead officer via in meeting review	To consider ways to increase the inclusion of residents.	SCSC	Start: 08/07/10 End:	Teresa Bell - 2730 Community Services	Councillor Joe Mooney	Fits the acceptance criteria and likely to be high profile with inspectors.

APPENDIX 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/09/37	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:	Mark Harris - 2568 Policy & Communication	Councillor Graham Pask/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.
OSMC/09/38	Whether young people moving into adulthood are sufficiently equipped to be independent, including the way they access recreational activities. To give consideration to undertaking a review that examines whether those moving from childhood to adulthood are equipped to be sufficiently independent to operate as young adults, including the way they access recreational activities.	In meeting review with information supplied by, and questioning of, lead officers.	To examine whether those moving from childhood to adulthood are equipped to be sufficiently independent to operate as young adults.	SCSC	Start: End:			This was a recommendation of the facilities for young people task group that was endorsed by the OSC.
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: End:	David Hogg - 2815 Youth Services & Commissioning	Councillor Barbara Alexander	High profile activity that addresses concerns raised consistently by local people.
OSMC/09/40	Aiming High for Disabled Children Review of progress in implementing the strategy.	In meeting review with information supplied by, and questioning of, lead officers.	Monitoring item	SCSC	Start: End:	Lorna Hunt - 2735 Children & Young People's Services	Councillor Barbara Alexander	The strategy is in its very early stages. Possible review in a years time. HSC have also requested a briefing paper.
OSMC/09/41	Commissioning education and training services for 16-19 year olds To consider whether scrutiny has a role in reviewing diploma provision across the district with local authorities taking over the role of Learning and Skills Councils.	Information supplied by, and questioning of, lead officers, and external partners.	To be identified.	SCSC	Start: End:	Ian Pearson - 2729 Education	Councillor Barbara Alexander	An area identified for potential future review by the Select Committee.
OSMC/09/43	Policy for Private Housing Sector Renewal To review initiatives relating to private sector housing renewal policy.	In meeting review.		SCSC	Start: End:	June Graves - 2733 Housing & Performance	Councillor Alan Law	Meets acceptance criteria re budget examination.

APPENDIX 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/09/44	Review of special schools To review current role and breadth of needs met by special schools.	Information supplied by, and questioning of, lead officers, and external partners.		SCSC	Start: End:	Ian Pearson - 2729 Education	Councillor Barbara Alexander	If role can be extended, potential to reduce out of area placements.
OSMC/09/45	School meals For the Select Committee to discuss.	Information supplied by, and questioning of, lead officers, and external partners.	To be identified.	SCSC	Start: End:	Ian Pearson - 2729 Education	Councillor Barbara Alexander	Currently subject of BIEP review.
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: End:	Mark Vernon - 2552 Children & Youth Services	Councillor Barbara Alexander	This was a recommendation of the facilities for young people task group that was endorsed by the OSC.
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: End:	June Graves - 2733 Housing & Performance	Councillor Alan Law	As requested by OSMC on 26th January 2010.

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