

Title of Report:	Stronger Communities Select Committee
Report to be considered by:	Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission
Date of Meeting:	1 March 2011

Purpose of Report: To provide an update on the work of the Select Committee.

Recommended Action: To note the information.

Stronger Communities Select Committee Chairman	
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Executive Report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Committee met on 7 February 2011 and the draft minutes are attached at Appendix A. A summary of the main discussions are as follows:

2. Demand for Primary School Places

- 2.1 It was reported that 75% of West Berkshire resident applications were offered their first choice of place in 2010. 71% of the total number of applicants were offered their first choice. Although there was an adequate number of places across the District, immediate action was required in some schools to help meet a shortfall of places.
- 2.2 The School Place Plan has been updated. An outcome of this work is agreement to conduct area reviews for each of the 6 areas identified across West Berkshire. Changes to place planning could be incorporated as a result. The prediction model for places is also used to help understand demand in individual schools.
- 2.3 Changes to some catchment areas are being planned in time for the 2012 admissions round. These changes and changes to school numbers are felt necessary to help further meet parental preference. Efforts are being made to increase the number of places in some schools without incurring additional costs.
- 2.4 An update report was requested once the current round of admissions has completed. The item is therefore retained on the work programme.

3. School Academies

- 3.1 Terms of Reference for a review into this subject were agreed subject to some minor amendments. Two meetings will be held in the near future.

4. Scrutiny review into the Council's Common Housing Register

- 4.1 A lengthy debate was held on the draft recommendations formed as a result of the review. Some concern was expressed by Councillor Alan Law, Portfolio Holder for Housing in attendance for the item, that work had not been adequately conducted to assess the resource implications of some of the recommendations and the benefits they could bring. Councillor Law believed that enabling Ward Members to access data was not possible with existing software and therefore costs would be incurred.
- 4.2 Committee Members accepted that the recommendations should be fully investigated and costs identified to help inform decisions. However, there was agreement to not significantly amend the report as it was felt that efforts should be made to empower Ward Members to assist residents where possible.
- 4.3 The report is contained under item 11 of this agenda for the Commission's consideration.

5. Standards and Effectiveness Panel

- 5.1 An exempt report was received which detailed the work of the Panel. This was in response to a recommendation of a previous scrutiny review.
- 5.2 A common thread was noted in the reports of concerns in relation to the work of Property Services and its contractors. This has been the subject of a detailed review conducted by the Resource Management Select Committee. It was agreed that the circulation of these reports would be extended to ensure that concerns were identified and, where possible, addressed.

6. Discussion items scheduled for the next meeting

- 6.1 Two meetings will be arranged in the near future to conduct the review into School Academies.

7. Work Programme

- 7.1 The latest work programme for the Select Committee is contained within Appendix A of item 18 of this agenda.

Appendices

Appendix A – Stronger Communities Select Committee draft minutes from 7 February 2011.