

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 8th March, 2011

Present: Cllr D Thornewell (Chairman), Cllr G Court (Vice-Chairman), Cllr J A L Balcombe, Cllr P F Bolt, Cllr C Brown, Cllr F R D Chartres, Cllr D A S Davis, Cllr M O Davis, Cllr Mrs F A English, Cllr D W P Evans, Cllr Mrs M F Heslop, Cllr Mrs S L Luck, Cllr A G Sayer, Cllr D W Smith and Mr D G Still (co-opted member).

Councillors Mrs Anderson, Baldock, Clements, Cure, Heslop and Worrall were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Allison and Mrs Oakley and Mr Drury (co-opted member).

PART 1 - PUBLIC

**SC
11/007** **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made.

**SC
11/008** **MINUTES**

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 8 February 2011 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

**SC
11/009** **REVIEW OF THE MEDICAL AND WELFARE ASSESSMENT
PROCESS FOR HOUSING APPLICANTS**

The report of the Director of Health and Housing presented a review of the process for assessing the medical and welfare priority for housing applicants undertaken by a Medical and Welfare Panel comprising officers from the Environmental Health and Housing Service and Russet Homes. The review concluded that the process was robust and effective, transparent and consistent, resulting in fewer delays than the previous approach involving assessment by a local GP and was also more cost-effective.

Members were advised that refresher training for staff by NowMedical had been scheduled for 18 May 2011. It was also considered appropriate to review the content of the medical and welfare assessment form, measuring it against the Fog Index, a readability test designed to show how easy or difficult text was to read. A further

suggestion involved the Chief Housing Officer arranging to observe future Medical and Welfare Panel meetings in order to provide context to cases that were referred to her in the future.

Members raised the question of possible impacts on the assessment process of the major changes in housing legislation and health arrangements. In an effort to encourage greater dialogue between service providers in the housing and health fields, officers were requested to assess and report back on appropriate levels of connectivity and whether the Council was meeting them.

RECOMMENDED: That

(1) the conclusions of the review be accepted and the following actions be endorsed:

(i) that the Chief Housing Officer attend Medical and Welfare Panel meetings intermittently to better inform the review process in respect of welfare cases in accordance with stages two and three of the procedure attached at Annex 1 to the report;

(ii) that the medical and welfare assessment form be subject to a review using the Fog Index;

(2) it be noted that refresher training for panel members has been scheduled to take place on 18 May 2011; and

(3) a future report be submitted following an assessment of the Council's connectivity with other services in the housing and health fields.

DECISIONS TO BE TAKEN BY THE COMMITTEE

**SC
11/010**

SCOPING REPORT - REVIEW OF PLANNING ENFORCEMENT

The joint report of the Chief Executive and Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure set out proposed terms for the forthcoming scrutiny review of Planning Enforcement. The report suggested a number of matters to be reviewed and assessed in order to establish how the planning enforcement function might be evaluated and its effectiveness improved. It was noted that one of the key issues for the review would be how resources were managed and the way in which cases were prioritised and communicated to residents.

Members made a number of suggestions for inclusion or emphasis in the review including:

- application of a more formal "triage" system to filter cases for priority;

- introduction of a " light touch" for clear and easy to process cases;
- enforcement of positive conditions attached to planning permissions as well as unauthorised development;
- need for clarity and public explanation of the respective roles of planning enforcement and other civil remedies in securing action;
- review of the role of the local Member in the initial stage of an alleged breach;
- clarification of the position regarding anonymous complaints;
- timing of the implementation of section 106 agreements and impact of future legislation in this area;
- detailed assessment of the costs of the service and future level of provision.

RESOLVED: That the terms of the review as set out in the report be approved subject to inclusion of the issues raised by Members as indicated above.

**SC
11/011**

LAST MEETING OF MUNICIPAL YEAR

This being the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in the current municipal year, thanks were recorded to the Chairman for the manner in which he had conducted the business of the main committee and review sub-groups.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

**SC
11/012**

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

No items were considered in private.

The meeting ended at 2022 hours