

## EAST HERTS COUNCIL

### COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 27 JULY 2010

#### REPORT BY: CHAIRMAN OF COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

#### SELECT-COMMITTEE STYLE DISCUSSION WITH EAST HERTS CITIZENS' ADVICE SERVICE (EHCAS) AND THE REGISTERED SOCIAL LANDLORDS (RIVERSMEAD AND SOUTH ANGLIA HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS) – AN INTRODUCTION TO THE VISITING SPEAKERS

WARD(S) AFFECTED: all

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### **Purpose/Summary of Report**

This report is intended to introduce the visiting speakers from the external agencies (EHCAS and Housing Associations) and confirm the set of questions they have received as part of their briefing for this meeting.

<b><u>RECOMMENDATION FOR : Community Scrutiny Committee</u></b>	
<b>(A)</b>	that the responses from representatives of EHCAS and the Housing Associations to the prepared set of questions be considered; and
<b>(B)</b>	any performance data given by EHCAS, Riversmead and South Anglia for the year 2009/10 be noted.

#### 1.0 Background

- 1.1 In recent years the Community Scrutiny Committee has invited EHCAS and the Housing Associations (Riversmead and South Anglia) to give an 'annual report' in person to members. These agencies have responded positively to these requests and each has given an individual presentation on an annual basis and supplied members with written information as requested.
- 1.2 Members have appreciated the willingness of these agencies to attend meetings and contribute to the scrutiny process within East Herts. The individual presentations have been interesting and given highlights of the previous year's work undertaken by each

organisation – with the content of each presentation having been chosen by the speaker.

## 2.0 Report

2.1 During the scrutiny evaluation and planning workshops held annually in January and February, Members decided they wished to strengthen scrutiny through a more focussed approach to questioning and evidenced-based analysis/assessment.

2.2 Alongside this, the Health Engagement Panel also reported back on their successful piloting of a 'select committee style' approach to scrutiny when working with a range of external agencies. The Panel reported how helpful it had been to have several different organisations attending together, all responding to the same questions and contributing to the follow-up discussion. Members felt this gave them a far more rounded and complete picture of what was happening in the East Herts district in respect of the topic under discussion.

2.3 At an earlier meeting of Community Scrutiny, Members agreed to try this 'select committee style' of approach with the EHCAS and the Housing Associations rather than continue to invite them to each give a separate presentation.

2.4 Members agreed that a limited number of key lines of questioning should be designed to elicit information on issues shared by all three agencies. These themed questions should reflect the main objectives, current priorities and concerns of the council.

2.5 The calling of the General Election for May 2010 lead to the cancellation of the last meeting of this committee as it fell within the 'purdah' period. This was the meeting where a draft set of questions was to be considered. In order to brief the visiting speakers in good time, the draft questions were discussed with and approved by the Chairman of Community Scrutiny.

2.6 The core themes of the questions are:

- **Listening to residents**
- **Working within the LSP**
- **Economic recession**
- **Community Cohesion (sustainable communities)**
- **Climate Change and carbon reduction**

- 2.7 The questions are set out in Essential Reference Paper B. The visiting speakers have been briefed on these in advance.
- 2.8 The visiting speakers expected at the meeting (to respond to these questions and any supplementary questions members may wish to ask) are:

<b>Gail Cambery</b>	District Manager	East Herts Citizens Advice Service
<b>Jeff Farrington</b>	Chair of Trustees	East Herts Citizens Advice Service
<b>Paul Huckstep</b>	Deputy Chief Executive	Riversmead
<b>Chris Wright</b>	Director of Housing	Riversmead
<b>Chris Ellison</b>	Managing Director	South Anglia Housing (part of the Circle Anglia Group)

### 3.0 Implications/Consultations

- 3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within Essential Reference Paper 'A'.

#### Background Papers

Four principles of good public scrutiny published by CfPS (Centre for Public Scrutiny) [click here for link to CfPS external site](#)

#### Contact Member:

Cllr Colin Woodward, Chairman: Community Scrutiny Committee

#### Contact Officer:

Ceri Pettit, Head of Strategic Direction and Performance Manager – Extn 2240

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## ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'A'

<p>Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/ Objectives</p>	<p>Effective use of the scrutiny process contributes to the Council's ability to meet two core objectives:</p> <p><b>Fit for purpose, services fit for you</b>  <i>Deliver customer focused services by maintaining and developing a well managed and publicly accountable organisation.</i></p> <p><b>Leading the way, working together</b>  <i>Deliver responsible community leadership that engages with our partners and the public.</i></p> <p>In monitoring the performance of the council's services and action plans, the Committee is monitoring the Council's achievement of all of its corporate objectives.</p> <p>Any additional issues identified for scrutiny will relate to at least one of the Council's corporate objectives.</p>
<p>Consultation:</p>	<p>Potential topics for scrutiny are always invited from members of the public, the Executive and all Members.</p>
<p>Legal:</p>	<p>According to the Council's constitution, the scrutiny committees are responsible for the setting of their own work programme in consultation with the Executive and in doing so they shall take into account wishes of members on that committee who are not members of the largest political group on the Council.</p>
<p>Financial:</p>	<p>Any additional meetings and every task and finish group has resource needs linked to officer support activity and time for officers from the services to make the required input.</p>
<p>Human Resource:</p>	<p>none</p>
<p>Risk Management:</p>	<p>Matters which may benefit from scrutiny may be overlooked. The selection of inappropriate topics for review would risk inefficient use of resources. Where this involved partners, it could risk damaging the reputation of the council and relations with partners.</p>

Suggested questions: to cover 2009/10 year	RSLs – what we would like you to specifically cover.	CAB – what would we like you to specifically address.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What feedback have you gathered from residents (statistical and perception)?</b></li> <li>• <b>How has this translated into service quality improvements?</b></li> </ul>	<p>What methods are used to ‘give voice to’ (all) tenants? Identify specific examples where services have changed as a result of feedback.</p> <p>What has been the impact of the introduction of the Tenant Services Authority and resident-led self-regulation?</p>	<p>What methods are used to gather client feedback?</p> <p>What are the main messages coming from the information gathered – what action has the CAB taken to address any issues raised?</p> <p>What has been the waiting time for advisor appointments? What action has the CAB taken to improve access to services for individuals in rural locations in East Herts?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Over the past year, what have you done with our LSP partners to improve the housing or life chances of East Herts residents?</b></li> </ul>	<p>Additional projects with Young mums, Parenting Skills and youth groups. FlexiCare. Which groups are still to be engaged – and what will you do differently to achieve this?</p>	<p>What work has CAB done within the LSP in 09/10?</p> <p>What client groups were the focus of this work – to what end? What were the measures of success?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What support or projects have you provided for East Herts residents in difficulties during the challenging economic climate of the past year?</b></li> </ul>	<p>Level of rent arrears? Any evictions due to this or any other reason which might be attributed to the economic ‘pinch’? What action is taken to support &amp; intervene?</p>	<p>What has been the recorded pattern of usage for debt advice, housing benefits, mortgage arrears, eviction notice...? Is the pattern noticeably different to previous</p>

	What steps have been taken to ensure the continued provision of Affordable Housing in East Herts? – what are the plans for 2010/11?	year(s)? Have there been any special CAB projects set up in East Herts in 2009/10 as a response to recession?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>With a changing demographics and residents' profile, what steps are you taking to help develop and sustain community cohesion?</b></li> <li>• <b>What support do you offer the most vulnerable residents and disabled members of the community?</b></li> <li>• <b>What work have you been doing with 'migrant workers' and residents from BMI groups?</b></li> <li>• <b>Have you undertaken a formal 'Equalities Impact Assessment' (or an equivalent) on your organization and the services it offers?</b></li> </ul>	<p>What strategies do you have to deal with the increasing demand on the 'Aids and Adaptations' budget? What is your current waiting list for this service in East Herts – and how will this be tackled during 2010/11?</p> <p>Maybe expand a little on FlexiCare – but this is addressed in question above.</p> <p>Projects in East Herts with migrants/BMI groups.</p> <p>Dealing with anti social behaviour.</p> <p>Outcome and resulting action plan from any Equalities review.</p>	<p>Have there been any 'group-specific' issues or common concerns which have brought people to seek support &amp; advice from the CAB?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vulnerable</li> <li>• Disabled</li> <li>• Migrant workers</li> <li>• From BMI groups.</li> </ul> <p>Can you give a case study which helps illustrate how CAB intervention has made a contribution to community cohesion in East Herts during 2009/10?</p> <p>Outcome and resulting action plan from any Equalities review.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What steps have you taken over the last year to reduce the 'carbon footprint' of your business?</b></li> </ul>	What have the RSLs done as a business (offices, procurement, staff travel .....)?	What has the CAB done as a business (offices, procurement, staff/volunteer

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What information have you passed onto residents regarding the 'green agenda'?</b></li> </ul>	<p>What retro-fitting of older properties has been carried out?</p> <p>What 'green' aspects have been incorporated into new buildings and developments?</p>	<p>travel...)?</p> <p>How much work has the CAB done with clients on projects such as 'Warm Front' ..... Does debt advice also look at reducing energy usage (and therefore costs)?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Can you outline one project or activity from your work in 2009/10 which you feel has had the greatest positive impact on or the biggest influence over the well being of a community (or group of individuals) in East Herts?</b></li> </ul>		

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