

***POLICY REVIEW SCRUTINY PANEL ON HOUSING STOCK OPTIONS –  
FINAL REPORT***

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## **MEMBERS OF THE POLICY REVIEW SCRUTINY PANEL**

From November 2000:-

**Councillor Sheila Knight – Chair**  
**Councillor Jan Jones – Vice Chair**  
**Councillor Sam Chaudhry \***  
**Councillor Michael Mannion**  
**Councillor Dennis Pearce**  
**Councillor Mark Thompson**  
**Also Councillor Brian White (Substitute Member for Councillor Thompson)**

*\* Councillor Joyce Paton replaced Councillor Chaudhry from May 2001*

From October 2001:-

**Councillor Sheila Knight – Chair \***  
**Councillor Jan Jones – Vice Chair**  
**Councillor Margaret Brierly**  
**Councillor John Cole**  
**Councillor Iain Dysart**  
**Councillor Michael Mannion**  
**Councillor Joyce Paton**  
**Councillor Dennis Pearce**

*\* Councillor Vivien Guy replaced Councillor Sheila Knight and chaired the Panel from March 2002*

From May 2002:-

**Councillor Sheila Knight – Chair**  
**Councillor Margaret Brierly – Vice Chair**  
**Councillor Tony Giles**  
**Councillor Dorothy Kilsby**  
**Councillor Beth Mitchell**  
**Councillor Dennis Pearce**  
**Councillor Amanda Ramsay**

## **OFFICER SUPPORT FOR THE PANEL**

Officer Support for the Panel has been supplied by scrutiny officers from the Chief Executive's Department, Scrutiny Team, at Merton Civic Centre. If you wish to discuss any aspect of this report, please contact Barbara Jarvis, Scrutiny Officer on 020 8545 3390 or by e-mail on [Barbara.jarvis@merton.gov.uk](mailto:Barbara.jarvis@merton.gov.uk)

This is the first policy review scrutiny report finalised for the Municipal Year commencing May 2002. The report was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on 24 July 2002 and the Commission endorsed it, prior to consideration by the Cabinet in September 2002.

IF YOU REQUIRE ANY FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCRUTINY PROCESS,  
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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report looks at the findings of the policy review of housing stock options undertaken by the Care Services and Housing Management Overview and Scrutiny Panel, which agreed to specifically focus on the consultation process leading up to a ballot of tenants and leaseholders on housing stock transfer.

It sets out key concerns expressed by the Panel about the consultation process and the mechanisms used to convey information to all those concerned. It also highlights important issues with regard to addressing the housing needs of the homeless and vulnerable groups, including those with mental health problems, who may be disadvantaged by any housing stock transfer and who it was considered fell outside of the consultation process.

The report makes specific recommendations, which are in brief as follows:-

- Lessons need to be learned from the problems experienced by tenants with regard to responsibility for maintenance issues, arising from housing stock transfer at Pollards Hill, where confusion occurred at the time of transfer and continues, over who was responsible for estate lighting and litter clearance from open spaces;
- Documentation must not be produced in colour on shiny paper, as the visually impaired have difficulty in reading such material. The text should avoid the use of jargon;
- It is imperative that information as part of the consultation process, which should be in clear, everyday language, reaches all those who should be consulted. It is also assumed that all the options and not just stock transfer will be consulted on;
- More people may present as being homeless, if tenants with problems are not accepted by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). Such people will not have a vote in the stock transfer consultation but it is essential that their position and views are respected and included;
- There are grave misgivings surrounding the housing of vulnerable people, i.e. homeless people, people who are evicted and people with mental health problems. Provision for these must be protected and maintained;
- Potential increases in demand for bed and breakfast accommodation are of concern and this will need careful management;

- It continues to be a statutory obligation for the Authority to consider vulnerable groups and therefore there is a need to ensure that this is tightly enforced in the contract terms with the RSL if and when transfer takes place;
- There is a need to ensure that housing management improves with the RSL and that no economies are made; (i.e. better quality and delivery of service);
- The community facilities which currently exist within some sheltered accommodation, e.g. at Yenston Close, need to be preserved in any stock transfer proposal, as they provides an essential social benefit to the residents there;
- The need to specify exactly what would be offered to tenants under any stock option proposal is vital – e.g. fixed rent terms, length of protection, tenancy status (i.e. secured Council tenancy or assured RSL tenancy). There is also the need to ensure that what is promised is deliverable;
- Regarding the draft consultation documents for the Stage 1 consultation process, which were scrutinised by the Panel on 13 March 2002, it was recommended that:-
  - \* The introductory letter should clarify the definition of ‘majority’ when considering the outcome of the ballot – ie of those who vote;
  - \* References to black and ethnic minority tenants in the consultation documents should not be abbreviated as some groups object to this;
  - \* A readable summary version of the proposed contract between the Council and Merton Housing Partnership should be made available to tenants/leaseholders;
- Should housing stock transfer occur, it is hoped that staff who do not wish to transfer to the Registered Social Landlord will be given the opportunity to apply for other reasonable vacancies;
- Decision taken not to oppose progression to Stage 2 of the process and a ballot of tenants and leaseholders.

With the outcome of the Stage 1 consultation process complete, and scrutiny of the Stage 1 results concluded, the Panel has decided that this is a good time to report its overall findings and specific recommendations.

## **CHAIR'S FOREWORD**

The Scrutiny Panel for Housing decided from day one its task was not to scrutinise the actual question as to whether Merton should transfer its housing stock to a registered social landlord. This very crucial decision was clearly the choice of the tenants themselves and the Panel were quite clear it wasn't within our remit to try and influence that either way. But, because it was such an important and far reaching decision, it was crucial that tenants had the whole of the available information and this was what we were scrutinising. We looked at the information that tenants were given and interviewed officers and the outside agencies involved in the consultation exercise.

The Panel remained open for the period of the consultation so we were able to continue to review at all stages the various information which was being conveyed.

We also had two meetings, one with Tenants Association officers in the early days, which gave us concern at that stage how little information had been passed on.

The other meeting was held at Pollards Hill Community Centre with residents of the Pollards Hill Housing Association, who had already voted and been transferred to an independent registered social landlord. This meeting threw up some very useful matters which would have needed to have been resolved, should there, in the end, have been a positive vote.

Overall, the Panel were concerned that the consultation was bland and offering only the positives of a transfer and not the negatives. However, tenants themselves made up their minds and voted to reject the proposed plans.

This scrutiny exercise showed how far scrutiny can go, in not just receiving the reports from officers, but allowing the Panel to meet with and hear from a much wider group of people who are affected by the issues and gave us the opportunity to feed these back to the decision makers. This is very far removed from the old committee system and I think that we all welcomed this particular opportunity.

I would like to thank all those people who took the trouble to come and meet with us about the issues, to all the members of the Panel who worked so hard and the officers who serviced the Panel.

**Sheila Knight**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Following a condition survey of housing stock in 1999, the London Borough of Merton commissioned an appraisal of the stock transfer and stock retention options available to the Council. This was undertaken by Chapman Hendy Associates, who produced a report in October 2000, detailing the various options open to the Authority.

The Scrutiny Commission, at its meeting on 28 November 2000, agreed to refer the scrutiny of housing stock options in Merton to the Care Services and Housing Management and Support Scrutiny Panel, to undertake a policy review.

The initial meeting of the Panel took place on 30 November, when draft terms of reference were considered. These were subsequently approved by the Scrutiny Commission on 9 January 2001. (See Appendix 1).

The Panel agreed that it would specifically focus on the consultation process with regard to possible stock transfer, since the decision on whether to transfer the housing stock would ultimately rest with the Borough's tenants and leaseholders through a formal ballot process. Public meetings were arranged, so that the Panel could hear views directly from local tenants and residents. Fuller details of these meetings can be found in Section 2 of this report and Appendices 3 and 4.

A formal request to the Executive Committee was made in January 2001, to the effect that the deadline for making a final decision to progress stock options should be deferred, in order to allow more time for the scrutiny process to be completed. Although this request was turned down, the Scrutiny Commission agreed that the Panel should continue its work on the Housing Stock Options Study and prepare an Interim Report on its findings to date.

The interim report of the Policy Review Scrutiny Panel was received by the Scrutiny Commission on 27 February 2001. The Panel did not make any recommendation on whether the Council should register an interest with DETR for consideration in the Housing Transfer Programme 2001/02. However, it did outline its intention to continue to meet to discuss issues of concern emerging from the policy review and to hear the views of local tenants.

A further interim report was produced in April 2001, following the Council's decision to apply for acceptance onto the Government's Housing Transfer Programme. The findings of this further report are included in Section 4, where the Panel's key concerns and questions raised are detailed and in Section 5, where the Panel's specific recommendations are set out.

The Panel met on sixteen occasions from November 2000 to July 2002.

## **2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE PANEL'S MEETINGS**

At an early stage, the Panel agreed that it was vital to be able to learn from local tenants and residents about their experiences with regard to stock transfer, to provide an opportunity for tenants to voice their concerns and to hear their views on the way the initial consultation process was being undertaken.

In order to involve as many members of the public in the discussion as possible, the Panel decided to hold public meetings around the Borough, to which tenants and residents were invited. Consequently, a meeting of Pollards Hill Housing Association tenants was arranged at Pollards Hill Day Centre on 11 January 2001. The purpose was to consult residents on the Pollards Hill estate who had already experienced housing stock transfer to Pollards Hill Housing Association.

The meeting was fairly well attended, and proved to be very useful and informative. Specific areas emerging from the meeting for the Panel's consideration were:-

- ❑ The need for a precise list of what areas the Council remains responsible for and what areas have become the responsibility of the Housing Association, in terms of reporting faults maintenance of the estate, tree lopping etc.
- ❑ Consideration to the freeholders on the estate in relation to voting rights. Ensure freeholders are given a specific statement of rights, options and benefits open to them at the start of the process.
- ❑ Ensure residents are given clear and concise list of commitments in relation to the refurbishment, at the start of the project.
- ❑ Ensure the contract of employment for the company undertaking the work is specific, including time scales/deadlines and the possibility of imposing penalties.
- ❑ Consider the increase in property value following refurbishment, in relation to the right to buy and whether this will effect the property band for Council Tax purposes.
- ❑ Consider the tenants altered tenure from secure to assured tenant.
- ❑ Consider the length of time for rent guarantee and the investment package available to the residents and whether this is likely to affect the voting.



- ❑ Consider any legal implications of a freeholder/tenant mix within the estate.
- ❑ Consider any future plans for the Housing Association e.g. future plans for amalgamation or future investment and whether this would have any affect on the estate and/or residents.

The Panel concluded that it was important that lessons were learned about the problems experienced with housing stock transfer at Pollards Hill, in terms of disputes about who was responsible for specific areas of maintenance.

A further invitation was extended to the registered tenants/residents associations in the Borough to attend a meeting at Merton Civic Centre on 15 March 2001, in order to be able to hear their views on the various options being considered and the initial consultation process being undertaken. This meeting was again fairly well attended.

The key issues highlighted at this meeting were:-

- ❑ It was generally felt that not much information had been seen to date on the stock option proposals and what had been produced, such as magazines/newsletters, had not necessarily reached everyone and therefore the message was not getting through;
- ❑ The general view was that the roadshows, which were held during November/December, could have been better organised and held for a longer period of time;
- ❑ Now that the Council had agreed to submit an application to the DETR for inclusion on the Government's Housing Transfer Programme for 2001/2, something along the lines of the roadshow would be useful now, especially if held in shopping centres and on Saturdays;
- ❑ Some surprise was expressed that such a huge policy change with such dramatic effect had not been more widely reported in the local press;
- ❑ With the Council's decision to apply to the DETR for inclusion on the Government's Housing Transfer Programme, it will be imperative to ensure that information as part of the consultation process reaches all those who should be consulted;
- ❑ Reference was made to the DETR guidelines on the consultation process, which is a detailed document and which includes firm guidance on the balloting process;
- ❑ The representative of Merton Tenants and Residents Group advised that the Group had held a meeting 3 months ago, which 8 associations had attended

and the stock options issue had been discussed. The outcome of this meeting was that the vote would be a 'No' vote, but all 23 associations which comprise Merton Tenants and Residents Group would be contacted on the matter;

- The importance of consulting on all the possible options, and not just stock transfer was emphasised;
- The need to use everyday language to explain the process was stressed – documents/information needed to be user friendly and available in other languages;
- Lessons to be learned from the process at Pollards Hill would need to be taken on board, although it was stressed that Pollards Hill had been treated as a special case, with particular and significant needs and had therefore attracted special consideration in the stock transfer process;
- Reference was made to the Tenants Conference held in the Council Chamber at the Civic Centre last November, which the consultants, Chapman Hendy, attended. Representatives considered that some of the responses given by the consultants at this meeting, to the question of how other local authorities who have not proceeded with stock transfer have fared, were somewhat negative;
- Concern over increased homelessness and the increase in levels of bed and breakfast provision was highlighted and reference was made to the questions framed by Shelter with regard to the implications of stock transfer;
- Clarity over who is responsible for what areas of maintenance and who tenants should contact with queries/complaints etc., was vital, whether it be the local authority or a housing association;
- There was discussion about the St. Helier estate, which cuts across two borough boundaries (Merton and Sutton), comprising a very large area, with an approximate 50/50 split between Council owned and privately owned dwellings. It was revealed that the Merton residents on the estate have formed themselves into a separate association;
- It was considered very important to ascertain whether any housing association involved in any stock transfer process, could meet the cost of bringing the housing stock up to standard. It was understood that the Council alone could not afford to do this, unless additional Government money became available;
- The need to specify exactly what would be offered to tenants under any stock option proposal was emphasised, e.g. fixed rent terms, length of protection, tenancy status (secured or assured) and to ensure that what is promised is deliverable;

- Problems which might arise from some areas voting for stock transfer and some against, leading to smaller groups being differently managed was highlighted. It was pointed out that there are already around 25 or more housing associations operating in the Borough;
- The issue of Tadworth estate was raised, which is shared with Reigate and Banstead, who have decided to go for stock transfer;
- The importance of holding public meetings was emphasised, even if not everyone attends or takes the opportunity to speak. The need to ensure that everyone is aware of the implications, including leaseholders, was stressed;
- The Council's obligation to appoint an Independent Tenants Adviser under the regulations was highlighted, to act as a liaison person in the process;

### **3. INVITEES AND PRESENTATIONS TO THE PANEL'S MEETINGS**

Apart from the invitation to local tenants and residents to attend the public meetings of the Panel, as outlined in Section 2, additional information was gained from other invitees with particular expertise in housing issues.

The Panel invited the Independent Tenants Adviser from SOLON, Roger Vinter, to its meeting on 6 November 2001, in order to hear his views on how the initial consultation phase was progressing and to learn of the types of questions tenants were raising with him. It emerged that four main consultation methods were employed. These were:-

- A publication called 'Merton Talk', produced and circulated to all public sector residents in the Borough. This generates feedback and is used as a communication tool with regard to events organised;
- 'Hotline' - a free of charge telephone line to the office;
- The use of surgeries in the afternoons and evenings, including sheltered housing schemes;
- Public Meetings – a two-way process for officers and residents, to ensure a more appropriate and effective communication process.

Various general questions had been put to the Independent Tenants Adviser, such as 'What is stock transfer?' 'Will the right to buy still exist?' 'Will there be rent increases or changes in tenancies?'

At the same meeting, the Panel also received a presentation from two representatives of the Community Housing Task Force, Sarah Webb and Joanne Drew, who outlined how the Task Force would be working with Merton's Housing

Department to achieve an appropriate transfer application, to ensure that it met all the Government's criteria, including that on consultation, which is the key focus of the Panel's scrutiny. The Task Force has strong links with the Housing Corporation.

Members of the Merton Housing Partnership Shadow Board (Tony Giles and Jon Feast) were invited to the Panel's meeting on 6 February 2002, and a presentation was given, which focussed on the Shadow Board's work to date. Merton Housing Partnership Shadow Board was set up to put a package together with regard to housing stock transfer, to respond to the need to inform tenants and leaseholders. The Shadow Board will only become fully operational if the housing stock transfer goes ahead.

During the presentation, the Panel sought clarification on the issue of homelessness, for which the Council will retain statutory responsibility but could arrange for Merton Housing Partnership to discharge its functions. Concern was expressed about housing for vulnerable groups, including those in sheltered housing. The Panel was advised that it is likely that the Council's preferred option will be for this responsibility to remain within the Council. The Shadow Board representatives advised that the criteria for allocating housing would be in place and would be adhered to. It was acknowledged that legislation would inevitably continue to dictate access to social housing.

#### **4. KEY CONCERNS AND QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE POLICY REVIEW**

During the course of the Panel's meetings, numerous key concerns and questions emerged from the discussion. There was exploration of the experiences of some other local authorities who have gone through a similar process, although any comparisons made were with boroughs that are similar to Merton, in order to receive a realistic comparison. The Panel indicated that it wished to see the documents to be used for the formal consultation stage, but that, until these had been produced, a list of key questions would be formulated, to include those posed by the organisation Shelter. These are:-

- Have tenants been consulted effectively and what advice and support has been given?
- What about the interests of people in housing need – has there been any consultation with organisations representing them, particularly homeless groups?

- Can there be assurances of full tenant participation after transfer and how can this be guaranteed?
- Have all tenants had changes in tenancies and possible rent increases explained?
- What will happen to families and individuals who are homeless and how will this be managed?
- What will happen to specific quotas e.g. Mental Health? Who will manage the housing waiting list and allocation?
- Will the transferred landlords be able to exclude people and can the local authority prevent this?
- How will the Council ensure vulnerable clients are housed and supported and has any consultation been done with groups representing them? (The Panel was advised that a communications consultant was being appointed to address this need).
- How will the Council ensure it meets its statutory duty to the homeless?
- What about peoples' rights and needs for transfer?
- Will housing management improve and can we ensure no economies are made?

The Panel were concerned with the adequacy of the initial consultation process, in that information and documents, such as newsletters, had not filtered through effectively to all interested parties, leaving many tenants unaware of the proposals and how they may affect them personally. There was also concern over a potentially large number of tenants not being fully aware of the implications of possible stock transfer and being unclear over what options are being considered. A poor turnout had been experienced at some of the events held to date, in particular some of the roadshows. Therefore, the Panel stated that it expected to be able to comment on the formal consultation documents when produced for the next stage and also be advised of and comment on the process to be followed.

Specific concerns were also expressed for particular sectors of the community, who could be adversely affected by any stock transfer, and whose interests will therefore need protecting. The Panel has grave misgivings surrounding the housing of homeless and vulnerable people, for which provision must be maintained.

Key concerns expressed were:-

- Who will run the homeless service and how will the Council meet its statutory duty to meet the needs of homelessness?
- What are the implications for managing the allocations list?
- Will quotas for vulnerable people, such as those with learning difficulties and mental health needs be renewable?
- Potential increases in demand for bed and breakfast accommodation are of concern to the Panel and this will need careful management;
- The issue of whether sheltered accommodation is included in any plans for stock transfer was raised and, if so, the question of how older people will be advised of the proposals, without causing them unnecessary worry, agitation or confusion, needs to be properly thought through;
- The need to preserve community facilities within tenants estates was strongly emphasised and this must be taken on board, as such facilities are of vital social benefit to estates;

In view of all its concerns, the Panel agreed that a further interim report should be presented to Scrutiny Commission and Executive Committee in April 2001, outlining the Panel's views, findings and concerns to date. This interim report included the Panel's concerns as outlined above and the notes of the Panel's two public meetings held on 11 January and 15 March 2001. Whilst the impending consultation process was under way, the Panel continued to meet as and when appropriate to consider various related aspects of potential housing stock transfer, such as its impact on vulnerable people, taking into consideration the Housing Strategy for Vulnerable People within the Borough.

The Panel reiterated its concern that, if not properly managed, the burden of responsibility for housing vulnerable people, the homeless and those with learning difficulties, as outlined in the Interim Report, would fall on Social Services. The Panel was advised that the Council would need the mechanism to carry out assessment of housing needs and vulnerability and there will therefore be a continuing need for a homelessness and housing advice service. Advice was also given that the membership of the Joint Working Group, which had been set up to look at the stock transfer issue from all sides, had been enlarged to include a wider range of people expressing an interest in the matter. The issue was also being discussed in other fora, including district housing panels and the Housing Consultative Forum.

The Panel also considered that there needed to be more clarity on the difference between a secure Council tenancy and an assured RSL tenancy. Also, clarity on the majority required in the ballot was requested. The Panel was advised that the Government has not been prescriptive about the percentages of those voting and those in favour or against, only that more than 50% of tenants need to have voted and the majority should approve the transfer proposals in order to proceed.

The formal Stage 1 consultation process was scheduled to take place in May/June 2002 prior to any decision to go to a ballot. The Panel was advised that all previous consultation arrangements were to be reviewed prior to this and the consultation process was likely to include a range of mechanisms, such as workshops and newsletters, as well as videos, personal calling, estate meetings etc.

The Panel expected that existing housing staff would be able to transfer to a Housing Association under the TUPE arrangements, to maintain the same level of staff establishment to deal with housing/tenant issues. However, there were some concerns:-

- ◆ What happens if staff do not wish to transfer?
- ◆ Do they make themselves unemployed if they decline to transfer and what is the situation if they have been employed in local government for some time - are their rights protected?

## **5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following specific recommendations arose during the duration of the policy review's investigation, arising from the Panel's main concerns, which were considered not to have been addressed:-

- Lessons need to be learned from the problems experienced by tenants with regard to responsibility for maintenance issues, arising from housing stock transfer at Pollards Hill, where confusion occurred at the time of transfer and continues, over who was responsible for estate lighting and litter clearance from open spaces;
- Any documentation must not be produced in colour on shiny paper, as the visually impaired have difficulty in reading such material. Also the text should avoid the use of jargon;
- With the Council's decision to apply to the DETR for inclusion on the government's Housing Transfer Programme, it is imperative that information as part of the

consultation process, which should be in clear, everyday language, reaches all those who should be consulted. It is also assumed that all the options and not just stock transfer will be consulted on;

- More people may present as being homeless, if tenants with problems are not accepted by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). There will continue to be a need for a provider to deal with the homeless through the bed and breakfast channel, with the possibility that demand for this provision will increase. Such people will not have a vote in the stock transfer consultation and it is considered that their position has not been adequately explained. It is essential that their position and views are respected and included. The Panel remain concerned that this issue has not been satisfactorily resolved;
- There are grave misgivings surrounding the housing of vulnerable people, i.e. homeless people, people who are evicted and people with mental health problems. Provision for these must be protected and maintained;
- There is a need to ensure that the needs of people from vulnerable groups, especially those in housing need are protected, which would require specialist consultation. It continues to be a statutory obligation for the Authority to consider vulnerable groups and therefore there is a need to ensure that this was tightly enforced in the contract terms with the RSL if and when transfer took place;
- Potential increases in demand for bed and breakfast accommodation are of concern to the Panel and this will need careful management;
- There is a need to ensure that housing management improves with the RSL and that no economies are made; (i.e. better quality and delivery of service);
- The community facilities which currently exist within some sheltered accommodation, e.g. at Yenston Close, need to be preserved in any stock transfer proposal, as they provides an essential social benefit to the residents there;
- The need to specify exactly what would be offered to tenants under any stock option proposal is vital – e.g. fixed rent terms, length of protection, tenancy status (i.e. secured Council tenancy or assured RSL tenancy). There is also the need to ensure that what is promised is deliverable;
- Regarding the draft consultation documents for the Stage 1 consultation process, which were scrutinised by the Panel on 13 March 2002, it was recommended that:-
  - a) The introductory letter should clarify the definition of ‘majority’ when considering the outcome of the ballot – ie of those who vote;



- b) References to black and ethnic minority tenants in the consultation documents should not be abbreviated as some groups object to this;
  - c) A readable summary version of the proposed contract between the Council and Merton Housing Partnership should be made available to tenants/leaseholders.
- Should housing stock transfer occur, it is hoped that staff who do not wish to transfer to the Registered Social Landlord will be given the opportunity to apply for other reasonable vacancies;

The Panel scrutinised the outcome of the Stage 1 consultation process on 10 June 2002 and, although it remained concerned with the process, did not oppose proceeding to the ballot of tenants and leaseholders, in view of the results which emerged from Stage 1

(The decision to move to the Stage 2 ballot process was subsequently taken by the Cabinet Member for Housing on 20 June 2002.)

## **6. LESSONS FOR ANY FUTURE MAJOR CONSULTATION**

The Panel agreed that, as a result of undertaking this policy review, the following key lessons had been learned with regard to any future major consultation process:-

- There is a need to ensure that people with sensory and learning disabilities are not excluded from the consultation process, through the use of services such as braille, documents in large print, tapes and adequate publicity of consultation meetings;
- Information supplied should not be one-sided, but should highlight the negative as well as the positive side;
- It needs to be acknowledged that proper consultation is a very complex process and the interests of all people, including those with no vote, need to be considered.