

## **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **PETITIONS MEETING**

At a meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2006 at 10.00 am

#### **PRESENT:**

Councillors: Mrs DP Roberts  
Mrs JM Guest  
SM Edwards  
MJ Mason

Officers: S Hampson Executive Director  
T Cassidy Supported Housing Manager

Petitioners:	C Porter	John Impey Way, Melbourn
	M Ambrose	John Impey Way, Melbourn
	I Dodd	Kay Hitch Way, Histon
	EJ Vale	Kay Hitch Way, Histon
	RD Lipscombe	Kay Hitch Way, Histon
	W Oulton	Kay Hitch Way, Histon
	D Wicks	St Vincent's Close, Girton
	Mrs D Wicks	St Vincent's Close, Girton
	M Collins	Franklin Gardens, Cottenham
	T Ledley	Franklin Gardens, Cottenham
	L Howe	Franklin Gardens, Cottenham
	LD Howe	Franklin Gardens, Cottenham
	J Todd	St Audrey's Close, Histon
	E O'Reilly	St Audrey's Close, Histon
	B O'Reilly	St Audrey's Close, Histon
	C Burr	St Audrey's Close, Histon
	V Isherwood	St Vincent's Close, Girton
	E Andrews	St Vincent's Close, Girton
	AK Bateman	St Vincent's Close, Girton
	G Allen	St Vincent's Close, Girton

#### **1. INTRODUCTIONS**

Councillor Mrs Roberts opened the meeting by introducing herself as the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for the Sheltered Warden Scheme. She explained that she wished to hear the concerns of those present so that any issues with the operation of the scheme could be identified and dealt with. She added that councillors from the wards of the sheltered schemes represented were also at the meeting and wished to hear concerns.

She then asked for those present to introduce themselves.

#### **2. PETITIONER REPRESENTATIONS**

C Porter from John Impey Way in Melbourn opened the proceedings for the petitioners by saying that everybody, including wardens, was concerned about the changes. He said that he considered that the council was breaking a lot of promises, the most crucial that there would be a warden on site. He said that a warden on site meant protection for the residents and gave an example of where a warden on site had been able to attend to a resident that had taken a fall.

I Dodd from Kay Hitch Way said that, from experience, wardens had to contend with very few calls after 17:30 and that he didn't understand how the new arrangements would be an improvement. He said that he could see no reason for the change.

Cllr Roberts asked those present if they felt that they had been given the relevant facts when the exercise had first started.

The general consensus was that those present doubted the effectiveness of the consultation process and believed that the Council had ridden roughshod over the wishes of the tenants. They also believed that the Council had already made the decision to move wardens off-site from the sheltered schemes.

Cllr Roberts then asked if the reasons for the change, especially around the finance had been explained.

The feedback was that the need for savings had been explained, but those present queried the need to make the saving at the expense of the most vulnerable group. The view was that charges had risen while the service provided had got worse.

Cllr Roberts then asked if those present were aware of the wardens' daytime responsibilities and duties. Those present understood that the warden was on duty from 9 to 5 Mondays to Fridays.

I Dodd asked where the protection and help, as promised, was provided under the new scheme. He gave an example of a power failure where Invicta had been contacted and had recommended to the client that she contact a family member to rectify the fault.

Cllr Roberts explained that the old system required that Wardens worked in the morning and were allowed to go off site in the afternoons providing that they were no more than 30 minutes away from the site. She added that the new system was run by the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and asked for examples of how the process was working.

I Dodd gave a number of examples. He said a tenant had fallen in her garden and a neighbour had pulled the emergency cord. Evidently Invicta had told the caller that she (the neighbour) could go and help pick her up. Eventually the son was contacted, an ambulance arrived and the faller taken to hospital where a broken hip was diagnosed. Another tenant used the cord and had to wait 20 minutes for a reply, while a third, who had contacted Invicta and been dealt with to his satisfaction, had then been contacted again by Invicta who were unaware that the problem had been resolved. He said that these examples undermined his confidence in the service. He asked if the reason for the changes was to save money.

Steve Hampson, Executive Director, said that the need to review the funding of the sheltered warden scheme was behind the proposal. He explained that the service was funded from three sources; the charges levied on tenants, the County Council's "Supporting People Fund" and the Council's housing bank account. He further explained that by drawing on the housing revenue account, the 1500 people in the sheltered schemes were effectively subsidised by council tenants to the tune of approximately £900,000 per year. He added that the "Supporting People Fund" was set to reduce by 30% over the next 5 years. He said that it was difficult to judge the new system as it had only been running for 6 months, but initial indications were that £300,000 would be saved over the first year, reducing the subsidy to £600,000. He said that savings were essentially staff costs, bought about by the reduction in the number of wardens from 72 to 40.

I Dood said that he couldn't see where the savings were coming from, as he believed there were now more managers.

Steve Hampson replied that the opposite was the case and the management structure had been reduced. He explained that there were now three area managers whereas previously there had been four and that the number of office staff administering the scheme had remained the same. He gave an assurance that there were no new managers replacing the part-time wardens.

C Porter said that he believed the issue should not be one of money. He contested that SCDC were breaking the contracts of both the wardens and the residents who had been promised an on-site warden.

Steve Hampson replied that the wardens' contracts were confidential and they would not be discussed at the meeting. In terms of the contracts with residents, he said that he was sure that SCDC had taken proper legal advice and that the correct processes had been followed.

Mrs Ambrose replied that her contract specified a warden on-site and asked if SCDC would be prepared to go to court over the issue.

Councillor Roberts said that going to court was a matter for those in the room to decide, adding that she too was confident that the correct legal processes had been followed. She said that the new scheme was still in early days and appreciated that there had been changes, which explained why the meeting had been called. She said that a return to the old system of on-site wardens was an unrealistic, but that SCDC were looking for the concerns and experiences of residents so that improvement opportunities could be identified. She said that the members' group that was formed to instigate the original changes would be reconvened at the end of January 2007 to revisit the situation and see what further changes could be made. However, she warned that any subsequent changes to the scheme could not be made at short notice.

Councillor Roberts then went on to explain that wardens currently on-site would not be moved until suitable accommodation was available. She said that it was important that wardens were moved to remove any potential for conflict between role and expectation. She believed that if wardens remained on site residents would continue to approach them rather than use the emergency cord to contact Invicta. She added that some wardens were living in properties that could be reallocated to tenants on the Council's waiting list, but admitted that there were concerns about who such properties would be allocated to.

L Andrews said that tenants would not contact on-site wardens in the evenings without good reason. He also said that he believed many sites had vacant properties.

A Bateman said that to move wardens off-site and then have them commute back was not an environmentally friendly policy.

Councillor Mrs Roberts warned that it would be inappropriate to discuss individual cases at the meeting.

I Dodd said that he was concerned about letting wardens' properties to families with children saying that he was of the opinion that older people and children did not mix.

Councillor Mrs Roberts asked for more details of such cases where difficulties had occurred and said that a rigorous set of checks and balances would be in place to ensure that problems did not occur.

W Outon said that he believed a potentially dangerous situation could occur over Christmas when there would be no warden coverage for ten days.

Councillor Mrs Roberts replied that the situation had been discussed with officers and that arrangements had been put in place to ensure that residents' needs would be met over the Christmas period.

Steve Hampson introduced Tracy Cassidy, the Supported Housing Manager, and said that she could explain the Christmas arrangements. He also asked those present to inform SCDC when there were issues such as a delayed action by Invicta or properties standing empty.

Mr Hampson was asked to explain the process following a complaint about Invicta.

Steve Hampson explained that Invicta have a system that logs all calls and which produces statistics to cover a number of key indicators. He said that Tracy Cassidy held regular meetings with Invicta to monitor performance.

C Porter asked why it was not possible to give a specific answer to questions raised at the meeting.

Steve Hampson replied that the size of the task meant that it would be impossible for officers to carry the details of all cases with them at all times. He said that he wanted to be able to identify failures in the system and then implement improvements so that they would not be repeated.

C Porter gave the particular details of his case in which he considered that he had received poor service from Invicta.

Councillor Mrs Roberts expressed sympathy for Mr Porter's case, and said that there would always be cases that would highlight difficulties within the system. She said that she was using the meeting to listen to residents' concerns and thanked Mr Porter for his example, saying it was the sort of case that needed to be addressed.

C Porter replied that it was such cases that reinforced the need for residential wardens. He then raised the question of the effectiveness of temporary staff used to cover absences.

Councillor Mrs Roberts replied that the new system was still in its infancy and that the staffing situation was under review. However she expected the situation to be reached whereby residents would not see different faces and that there would be a group of regular wardens for each scheme.

W Outon asked for clarification of Christmas arrangements.

Tracy Cassidy explained that a letter would be sent to all residents to detail the arrangements. She said that the PCT would be providing the service and that for the 27 – 29th December a contact phone service would be provided by volunteers from SCDC. The letter would give details, but residents would be contacted on those days if they wished.

Councillor Mrs Roberts asked if this meant that the letter would ask residents if they wished to receive a call from SCDC to check that they were ok. Therefore SCDC would expect an answer from anybody called. She asked for clarification of the process if a call wasn't answered.

Tracy Cassidy said that in the event of a call not being answered SCDC would contact the PCT and the PCT would arrange for a visit to the tenant.

Councillor Mrs Roberts then referred back to the case of the power failure and asked for clarification of the process to be followed in the event of a similar situation for a tenant over the Christmas period.

Tracy Cassidy replied that the SCDC emergency repair team would be working and that Invicta had been advised to contact them.

Councillor Mrs Roberts said that she understood that if a tenant called in with a non-health related call then Invicta would contact the SCDC team who would give a timescale for the fault to be cleared and then clear the fault. She asked for this understanding to be confirmed.

Tracy Cassidy confirmed that Councillor Robert's understanding was correct.

Further concerns were then expressed about properties previously used by wardens being allocated to young families who could disturb the other residents.

Steve Hampson said that prior to the introduction of the new scheme he had visited each of the 45 sites and that he greatly appreciated that the needs of each site was different. He said that he thought families, per se, were not a problem, but if they became so then the situation would be addressed promptly. He said that he had confidence that good judgement was being used in placements, but that it would be unrealistic to think that there would be no problems. He added that he thought that the system was generally working well, but said that he needed to know quickly if things were going wrong.

R Lipscombe asked why, given that the removal of on-site wardens had been carried out as a cost savings exercise, a stock condition survey (SCS) exercise had been carried out in October using contractors that had appeared to do very little for their money. He asked why SCDC staff had not carried out the survey.

Steve Hampson explained that the SCS came about because of an obligation to assess all of SCDC's housing stock. The requirement to use a third party was imposed in case the Council considered transferring the stock to a housing association at a future date. He added that once the survey had been completed SCDC surveyors would update it on a yearly basis. He said that quality measures were built in to the survey and he would be happy to receive any information that suggested the survey had not been carried out properly.

Councillor Mason made reference to the SCS in respect of the site at Kay Hitch Way. He said that there was a recurring issue with the foul sewage system that would not have been picked up by the SCS and he asked that the issue be noted.

Councillor Mrs Roberts agreed and the Executive Director noted the issue for action.

Councillor Mrs Roberts said that the Council required feedback about the performance of Invicta, but added that they needed to be specific examples so that the records could be checked. She invited those present to remain behind at the end of the meeting so that any information about specific cases could be passed to council officers to follow up.

I Dodd said that Invicta were not doing the job properly.

Councillor Mrs Roberts again asked for specific examples so that they could be followed up.

Steve Hampson returned to the issue of temporary staff. He said that the important thing was the tenant's relationship with the site manager. He said that the issue of staffing levels would be addressed in the new year, with a view to stopping the movement of staff between sites. He added that it was perhaps the right time to review Invicta's performance. He said that he believed that Invicta were providing a good service and again stressed the need for actual examples to substantiate any allegations of poor service. He said that any

review would not be about returning to providing on-site wardens, but about identifying any improvements that could be made to eliminate problems that had shown up so far.

I Dood asked if those wardens with families would be moved off site, even if they were a “good fit” for the accommodation provided.

Steve Hampson said that the Council were looking at a variety of options, but that in broad terms the scheme was looking to move site wardens off site.

Councillor Mrs Roberts said that there were two factors for the Council to consider, the under occupancy of the wardens residence, and the movement of the warden off site to support the changes that had been made to the sheltered housing scheme.

Tony Leadley asked when the council had formulated its policy to change the job. He said that he had found reference to the issue in the Council minutes of 23 February 2006 and asked for a declaration for the reason for the change to be made at the meeting.

Steve Hampson replied that the Council had considered a range of options with differing factors so it would be impossible to state a single reason for the change. However he said that cost and flexibility had been key factors and that he was confident that these reasons had been communicated during the course of the consultation period. He said that each site had unique circumstances, but that the goal was to build a more flexible scheme that could live within its means. He added that involvement of the PCT meant that more specialised services could be provided, but that the new arrangements would take time to bed in. He added that the Council also had obligations to meet for its wardens as well as its tenants.

Tony Leadley said that the only record of the decision he could find was from the minutes of the Council meeting of 23rd February, adding that the minutes clearly stated that the review would not be progressed until the issue of wardens moving from their houses had been resolved. He added that he understood health and safety issues had also been raised in the review.

Steve Hampson confirmed that one of the issues in the report centred on the Working Time Directive.

C Porter challenged that the Council cared more about the health and safety of its employees than its tenants.

Steve Hampson reminded the meeting that the topic under discussion was sheltered housing. He said the primary concern was to provide a good and efficient service and that he was confident that the new service met the standards set by its predecessor.

C Porter suggested that lives would be lost as a result of the policy and there was general consensus to this.

Councillor Mrs Roberts said that neither the members nor officers of SCDC looked at lives in a slapdash manner, adding that there was a genuine concern for older people in the district. However she said that the current financial situation meant that the Council was able to be less generous than it had once been.

It was suggested that the council should have looked elsewhere to make savings and suggested that the pay of councillors had had a detrimental effect on the amount of money left to provide services.

Councillor Mrs Roberts said that SCDC had looked across the board at savings opportunities and had considered all options, including making some staff redundant. She

also explained the issue of councillor's pay and said that most councillors were very committed and put in a lot of time. She added that they could also be voted out if the electorate did not approve of their actions.

Councillor Mrs Roberts then moved to close the meeting, and thanked those present for their input. She said it would be useful as a guide for future thinking. She also invited those present to return in 6 months' time for a follow-up meeting.

C Burr said that he thought none of the issues raised had been answered and asked if the council planned to phase out wardens completely. He stated that all present had tenancy agreements and asked if they too would be replaced. He said that in his opinion Invicta were useless and gave an example of where they had acted against his wishes in respect of a faulty fire alarm.

Councillor Mrs Roberts asked Mr Burr to give further details to Tracy Cassidy so that the matter could be followed up.

Councillor Mrs Roberts then closed the meeting.

**The meeting closed at 12.10 am**