

Dear Executive Board Members,

Health Scrutiny Committee Report : The health impact of poor homes

The Health Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 29th November considered a report from the Head of Environmental Health, on issues around poor homes that the Environmental Health service deals with, particularly those that have health implications. (A copy of the full report is attached) The meeting was not quorate, but Members present felt that the Executive Board should consider the findings of the report and its recommendations.

Significant findings from the report were:

- The number of service requests concerning accommodation standards had more than doubled in the last five years. In 2006/07 the service received 1127 requests with 30% related to houses in multiple occupation.
- The inspection of private homes was mainly reactive based. More proactive work such as joint working with the PCT and health professionals was comprised by a lack of resources.
- The current corporate priority for the Public Health Team is environmental enforcement. No resources have been expressly provided for the investigation of poor homes.
- The only pro-active inspection programme of private homes is that relating to the mandatory HMO licensing scheme. The Public Health Team Manager stated that two Environmental Health Officers working in this area would make a significant difference.
- For non- licensable HMO properties the Housing Act (1985) standards on overcrowding were applied. (It was noted that this standard had not significantly changed since 1935) Many people who contact Environmental Health find they are not legally overcrowded even though their living conditions are very cramped. (The overcrowding standard is attached as appendix one to the full report)

In the light of these findings we would like the Executive Board to consider the report recommendations to:

1. Note the contents of the report,
2. Ask the Head of Environmental Health to write to the Department of Communities and Local Government to ask it to clarify the position and timetable regarding the consultation document on overcrowding,
3. Consider whether the Environmental Health service should seek to educate or issue guidance to health visitors/GPs etc on the overcrowding standards and advise them how to report problems arising from poor homes,

4. Consider whether the licensable HMO room standards should be adopted for non-licensable HMOs.

Yours sincerely

Cllrs Joe McManners, Paul Sargent & Stuart Craft