

CASE H

WESSEX COUNCIL - COUNCILLOR DOUGLAS

Summary

The East Wessex Community Area Forum covers three wards of the borough: Whapton, Box and Friary. The complainant is a Progressive councillor for Whapton and he and two other Progressives won the ward from Labour in 2004. The council is Labour-run: Councillor Douglas is deputy leader and also chairman of the area forum, which has the power to spend the Housing Investment Programme (HIP) monies allocated to it. Part of the allocation is budgeted to replace old wooden doors on council houses with PVCu doors.

The Progressive councillors for Whapton asked repeatedly for HIP funding for their ward. Each time they were told that it had already been committed for new doors in Councillor Douglas's ward (Box), and the vice-chairman's ward (Friary) with nothing for Whapton, even though there was a street there where doors were in urgent need of replacement (June Avenue). The complainant discovered that the chairman and vice-chairman of the forum have private business meetings in advance of the public forum. The complainant also discovered that Councillor Douglas had allegedly arranged matters so that all the spend on the new doors went to his ward.

It is alleged that at such a business meeting on 24 June 2005, Councillor Douglas and the vice-chairman privately approved the allocation of £14,404 to June Avenue. One of the defeated Whapton Labour councillors, who the complainant says plans to stand again in 2006 and is a friend of Councillor Douglas, then organised a petition along June Avenue asking the council to consider installing new doors. This was presented to the council by a resident on 29 June 2005 and then received by Councillor Douglas at a press call in advance of the formal meeting of the forum. The complainant believes that Labour has orchestrated the petition in the knowledge that the money had already been agreed. The complainant also believes that Councillor Douglas has used and abused his position as chairman of the forum, deputy leader, and as a member of the standards committee to manipulate the allocation of funding to his political advantage. The former Whapton councillor subsequently wrote to the newspaper to take credit for the decision and to criticise the Progressive councillors in Whapton Ward.

RU

12 AUG 2005

ATTACHMENTS

RECEIVED

RECEIVED
12 AUG 2005

Letter of Complaint

1. Community Area Forum Agenda for 7th July 2005
Item 4. The petition from the residents
Item 8. allocation of finance for UPVC doors for ~~June~~ Avenue confirmed.
2. Copy of petition submitted by hand by Councilor ~~Douglas~~ on 29th June 2005
3. Copy of the picture, and report from the local newspaper
4. Section of CAF report showing nil finance for uPVC doors and Decent Homes
5. Appendix 2 Shows the scheme, and the cost which was agreed at the meeting
6. Press cuttings resulting from the allocation of finance to ~~June~~ Avenue

Councillor Darren Smith
11A Marchmont Court
Whapton Estate
Wessex WE16 3TR

Dear Sir,

I am a member of the Progressive Group on Wessex Council, and a member of the Standards Committee.

I am deeply concerned at methods adopted by Councillor Douglas (Deputy Leader of the Council and a member of the Standards Committee) and his questionable allocation of Community Area Forum Finances. They appear biased and manipulative in promoting the Labour Party interests in the East Wessex Community Area Forum at the expense of the Progressive opposition, to an extent that I believe them to transcend ethical standards.

The June elections two other Progressives and I were elected to the three contested seats in the Whapton Ward displacing the former Labour representatives, Mr Lear, Mrs Delon and Mr Demetrios.

Mr Lear is an ambitious and dedicated Labour supporter, a prospective Labour candidate for the local elections in May 2006, and friend of the chairman of East Wessex Community Area Forum, Councillor Douglas.

After the June 2004 elections the East Wessex Community Area Forum was set up. My colleagues and I, as Progressives Councillors, became part of the East Wessex Community Area Forum, comprising of Whapton, Box and Friary Wards.

Acting on behalf of the residents we represent, we applied for Housing Improvement Programme finance to complete the work of programmes already started, which included the replacement of UPVC doors and windows in the area known as East Avenue. We were repeatedly informed that no money was available for those schemes as all the finance had already been allocated to Friary and Box Wards.

This situation has continued to date. Having publicly been accused of doing nothing for our ward, despite assertions there was no finance available, we were at a loss to know how these finances were being distributed and thus preventing us from carrying out work as Councillors for the benefit of the residents in our ward.

A chance remark by another Councillor that the Chairman (Councillor Douglas) and Vice Chairman (Councillor O'Sullivan) met on a regular basis, to determine the agenda of business and finance allocations, to be presented at the next Community Area Forum, which is held fourteen days after the business meeting.

The disclosure gave me cause of concern and prompted me to question the reason why no financial support was coming through for the Whapton Ward. On investigation it became clear that the chairman was totally biased against the Progressive Ward Councillors and his ability to direct finances in the CAF was reflected in the financial isolation of the ward.

Further enquiries revealed that since our election in 2004 the finance allocated to the Area Management Initiative for the Whapton Ward had been re-allocated at a business meeting, with instructions from the deputy leader, Cllr Douglas, that finance be re-allocated to the improvement of his Box ward in August Road and July Road Area. An officer in the Highways Department conveyed this information to me.

June Avenue and the immediate vicinity are in dire need of renovation. My two colleagues and I have, over months, requested finance for the completion of the UPVC doors programme. This request has been rejected, with the assertion that there was no money available.

At their business meeting on Friday 24th June 2005 the Chairman, Councillor Douglas and Vice Chairman were the only people privy to their decision of allowing £14,404 to go to the June Ave area for the completion of the UPVC doors programme.

That decision became an item on the agenda for the full CAF meeting to be held on the 7th July 2005 having been endorsed by the Chairman, Councillor Douglas.

On Wednesday 29th June the council received by hand a petition from Councillor Douglas requesting the council to consider the installation of UPVC front doors in June Avenue, to which he was already privy to, and had already agreed on Friday 24th June 2005.

This petition had been organised by his friend and colleague Mr Lear the prospective candidate for the Whapton Ward in 2006.

On the 7th July 2005, in the certain knowledge that the money had already been allocated, and prior to the full CAF meeting, Councillor Douglas was photographed, by a pre-arranged press photographer, recording the event of him receiving the petition that he had delivered to the council on 29th June 2005. It is the first occasion ever known in the council for a petition to be received and acted upon at the same meeting.

This arranged picture shows the presentation of the petition by a resident, which the Chairman's colleague Mr Lear in the background.

As a result of this manipulative scheming my organisation was put into a position of ridicule, enabling Councillor Douglas and his social and political friend Mr Lear to claim in the local newspaper that we had ineffectual and negligent in looking after the interests of our constituents.

I believe that Councillor Douglas, being aware of the situation, used his inside knowledge and dishonourably abused his position as the Chairman of the East Wessex Community Area Forum, his position has a totally disregard to the standards required of him.

I have been reluctant to pursue the procedure laid down to by the Standards Board, but feel I have no alternative in attempting to bring into the open what I perceive to be the gross abuse of confidentiality, and an over zealous exercise of political exploitation, the combination of which has prevented my colleagues and I exercising our discretion as Councillors to assist the residents we represent.

I therefore respectfully request you investigate the actions and consequences of this Councillor's behaviour, and thoroughly examine what I believe to be a serious breach of the standards now expected in local government.

Yours faithfully,



Councillor Darren Smith
Progressive Councillor
Whapton Ward
Wessex Council

Standards Board of England
1st Floor, Cottons Centre
Cottons Lane
LONDON
SE1 1QG

Agenda

	Notes
1. Declarations of Interest
2. Minutes of 26 May and 3 June 2005
3. Police and Community Safety Report
4. Petition from residents of <i>June</i> Avenue
5. <i>East Wessex</i> Community Area Profile
6. Do Your Bit – Presentation
7. Community Area Forum Grant Budget
8. Housing and Construction Related Services Information Report
9. Work Programme for the Forum
10. Chairman's Urgent Items
11. Dates of Future Meetings

East Wessex Community Area Forum Minutes

7 July 2005

Present: Councillors: Douglas (Chairman), Bird, Butterfield,
Iqbal, O'Sullivan, Outram, Ranns, Smith, Witherden

Mike Milligan, Community & Voluntary Sector Representative

Inspector Torney

Jack Spencer (Head of Streetscape), Diana Lodge (Community Safety Officer), Martin Naismith (Neighbourhood Manager), Gloria Coffin (Information Team Leader), Harvinder Singh Marway (Sustainable Design Manager), Asha Bhowe (Democratic Support Officer)

8 Members of the Public in attendance

1. Minutes of the meetings held on 26 May and 3 June 2005

Agreed: That the minutes of the meetings of the Forum held on the 26 May and 3 June 2005 be confirmed as a true record subject to the following amendments: -

3 June 2005 - Attendance:

Present: Cllr Outram

Absent: Cllr Iqbal

3 June 2005 – Item 2 ‘Housing Investment Programme’:

Agreed: That Meltonian Road wall to encompass flats - £27,751 – with half, £13,875.50 to be funded from this years budget and the remaining half to be funded from next years budget.

3 June 2005 – Item 3 ‘Community Area Forum Grant Budget 2005/2006’:

Agreed: That Snowdon House Residential Home was awarded a grant of £300 towards a Christmas party.

2. Matters arising from the minutes

Members requested that the remainder of the Box Park grass verges be looked at for replacement with block paving. The poor conditions of the grass verges on School Approach were also highlighted to the Forum. The Chair requested that the Sustainable Design Manager look into these issues.

Agreed: That the Executive Director Neighbourhood Services investigates the conditions of The Box Park Approach grass verges.

3. Police and Community Safety Multi-Agency Problem Solving Report

Submitted: Report of North Mercia Police.

Inspector Torney reported on the activities of the police in the Forum area and responded to questions arising from the report.

The police and the Council continued to work together to target anti social behaviour on the Whapton Hill Estate. It was noted that a search warrant had resulted in an arrest for the possession of drugs.

It was reported that 2 arrests had been made, for criminal damage, in the Friary Park area. It was noted that one motorcycle had been seized following warnings to the owner. The dangers for both the public and police in relation to off road motorcycles in the Friary Park area were once again highlighted.

All schools within the Borough are to be visited by the police and all valuable property was to be marked with Smart Water.

Members of the Forum were informed that 142 disorder letters had been distributed in the area and 97 litres of alcohol had been seized.

The Community Safety Officer provided an update on the Multi-Agency Problem Solving Group, the issues covered included:

- Kingsway– Monitoring of the area by police was to continue.
 - Gawthrop Close - It was noted that Community Safety was to fund repairs to the fence and further street lighting.
 - Detached Prevention Workers – It was reported that the pilot scheme had come to an end. Evaluations had shown that the
-

presence of Detached Prevention Workers had made a positive impact on the area in which they were deployed.

- Cliff Castle – A community conference had been arranged to deal with complaints from residents regarding young people playing football.
- Box Park Seating – Members were informed that removal of the seat had resulted in youths congregating in other areas of the park near to residential homes. The Detached Youth Worker had been requested to engage these young people in activities to keep them occupied. It was also noted that Police and Police Community Support Officers continued to patrol the area.
- Linden Lane – As a result of complaints from residents, the Community Safety Project Officer has arranged for the path between Cedar Grove and what was Poplar Grove to be fenced off.
- Empty Property in June Avenue – Youths were reported to be entering gardens and causing damage to other properties. This had been brought to the attention of the Community Safety Project Officer and the police were currently patrolling the property at appropriate times.
- August Avenue – The Anti-Social Behaviour Unit (ASB Unit) was to leaflet drop the area in an attempt to deter street parties similar to those that occurred last year.

Members of the Forum reported that since the ball park seating had been removed there had been no complaints received from residents. The Ward Members also requested information on the projects used to engage the young people.

It was reported that the parties in Avenue Victoria were taking place in the rear gardens as opposed to last year when they were in the front gardens. Inspector Thorney was to investigate this issue and an update would be brought back to the Forum.

A Member of the Forum raised concerns over the empty property in June Avenue and it was noted that the Neighbourhood Manager was to investigate this further and keep the Member informed.

Members thanked the police for responding to public concerns with extra patrols in the Whapton Moor area.

Problems with anti social behaviour in Southway Avenue and Kingsway were highlighted and the Sergeant was to pass these concerns on to Inspector Sutton.

Agreed: (a) That the report is noted; and (b) That the Executive Director Neighbourhood Services investigates the issue of the empty property in June Avenue and informs Councillor Ranns of any progress.

4. Petition from residents of June Avenue, Whapton Moor Estate

The Lead Petitioner submitted the petition from residents, which requested that consideration be given to the installation of uPVC front doors to the 23 properties in June Avenue.

Agreed: That the petition be accepted.

5. East Wessex Community Area Profile

Submitted: Report of the Executive Director Corporate Development

The report highlighted some of the key issues facing the communities within the East Wessex area and the detailed East Wessex Community Area Profile was attached.

A Member of the Forum requested that the Whapton Ward Councillors, Chair of the Forum and relevant Housing Officers arranged a meeting to look at the issues surrounding the Whapton Moor area. The Head of Streetscape suggested to the Forum that the Head of Housing attend the next meeting of the Forum to discuss the issues on the estate.

Agreed: (a) That the report be noted; (b) that a meeting be arranged with the Whapton Councillors, Chair of the Forum and Housing Officers to discuss the issues surrounding the Whapton Moor area; and (c) that the Head of Housing be invited to the next meeting of the Community Area Forum.

6. Do Your Bit – Presentation

Jack Spencer, Head of Streetscape, gave a presentation on the Council's 'Do Your Bit' initiative. The presentation covered the following areas:

- The Litter Problem
 - Do Your Bit – Our Aims
 - Education
-

- Operations
- Enforcement
- Working with the Business Community
- Recognising and Acknowledging Good Practice Engaging with our Community
- Marketing
- When and How will this be Delivered

It was noted that the Council had prosecuted offenders in the past for environment crimes and 750 warning notices had been issued in the Borough.

Members, Residents and Members of the Public were given the opportunity to raise any questions or offer feedback on the presentation.

It was highlighted that the Do Your Bit Campaign was aimed at raising public awareness to the litter problems faced by the Council. The Head of Streetscape explained that there was a need to educate and engage young people in schools and as a result from September 2005 the Streetscape Team was to deliver a presentation to all schools in the Borough.

It was reported that the Council's aim was to engage the public and raise awareness to the problems of environment crimes.

The Chair thanked the Head of Streetscape for the presentation and everyone for their participation in the discussions.

Agreed: That the presentation be noted.

7. Community Area Forum Grant Budget 2005/2006

Submitted: Report of the Executive Director Corporate Development

This report advised the Forum of the Community Area Forum Grant budget to this Community Area Forum, for the full 2005/2006 financial year, which was £53,361. The schemes outlined in Appendix A of the report showed that £50,428 had been allocated to date, leaving an unallocated budget of £2,933.

Members of the Forum queried the costs of £8,500 for the completion of the parking bays programme at Cliff Castle.

A Member of the Forum requested additional funding of £150 for the Box Park Family Fun Day to cover the costs of a barrier and traffic warden for the day.

Agreed: (a) That the report be noted; (b) that the Executive Director Neighbourhood Services investigates the costs of the parking bays scheme at Cliff Castle and reports back to the Forum; (c) that the additional funding for the Box Park Family Fun Day be agreed by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Forum once the appropriate grant form had been completed; and (d) that new applications be dealt with as follows in Table 1.

Table 1

Social Schemes

St Attracta's Senior Citizen Club – Christmas Party with entertainment - project cost £525, grant sought £150

That a grant of £150 be awarded.
Reason: This scheme represents a worthwhile contribution to the community.

Whapton URC Toddler Group – Early Learning Slide – project cost £199, grant sought £150

That a grant of £150 be awarded.
Reason: This scheme represents a worthwhile contribution to the community.

8. Housing and Construction Related Services Information Report

Submitted: Report of the Executive Director Neighbourhood Services.

This report provided information relating to Housing and Construction Related Services, including stock and status changes, together with details of the Housing Investment Programme (HIP) budget for 2005/2006. The total HIP allocation to the Forum was £681,046, which had been subdivided into three budget headings:

	100% (£)	Committed (£)	Balance (£)
Discretionary	99,423	68,599	30,824
PVCu Doors	99,423	99,423	NIL
Decent Homes	482,200	482,200	NIL

Details of the number of Empty Homes and Right to Buys in the Forum area were submitted for information, as were details of the Friary Park Redevelopment.

A Member of the Forum highlighted the efforts of Ward Members to obtain prices and commencement dates for work to properties in June Avenue, June Close and the remainder of the estate.

SHOWS NO
MONEY
AVAILABLE

Members were informed that all houses would be brought up to the Decent Homes Standard by 2010.

Members identified further schemes for the Housing Investment Programme 2005/2006.

Agreed: (a) That the report is noted; and (b) that the proposed schemes be dealt with as follows:

Organisation

Project

HIP 2005/2006

APPROVAL
GIVEN
↘

Upvc front doors – June
Avenue - £14,404.00

This scheme was agreed
*Reason: To improve security
at these premises.*

Upvc front doors – Roach
Court - £12,795

This scheme was agreed
*Reason: To improve security
at these premises.*

Fencing – 272 Linkswood
Gardens - £385.21

This scheme was agreed
*Reason: To improve security
at this premises.*

Fencing – 43 Sandringham
Avenue - £600.00

This scheme was agreed
*Reason: To improve security
at this premises.*

9. Work Programme for the Forum

Submitted: Report of the Executive Director Resources.

Details of the work programme for the Forum for the current Municipal Year were submitted. Members were invited to add any items to the work programme.

It was highlighted that a report was still to be received on the petition to close Whapton Moor Lane

Agreed: That the draft work programme be noted and amended.

Petition
received by
hand from
Cllr Douglas
29.6.05

We the undersigned being Council house tenants of June Avenue, request the Council to consider installing uPVC front doors to our homes.

Name	Address
KEITH + DEBRA	June Avenue
Kelly	June Avenue
MARGARET	June AVE.
Maxine	June Avenue
Les	June Ave
TRACY + Keith	June Ave.
DAVID	June Ave
CARL	June Ave
John	June Ave
DEBORAH	June AVE
JOHN	June Ave
SHARON	June Ave
/	June Ave
J.	June Avenue
N.	June AVE.
SAMANTHA	June AVENUE
C.	June AVE
K	June AVE

VICTORY IN BATTLE FOR NEW DOORS

COUNCIL tenants have won their battle for a £15,000 revamp of their homes.

Half of June Avenue in Wessex received new uPVC doors when Wessex Council undertook a repainting programme because they were beyond repair.

But the rest of the residents were left with old wooden doors.

A petition signed by 20 people was presented to East Wessex community area forum in a bid to rectify the situation.

And it was successful, with councillors agreeing to an estimated spend of between £14,000 and £15,000 to bring the other homes up to scratch.

Lead petitioner Mr Abbott told the forum: "All we are asking is that we are brought in line with the other estates."

"We have a lot of houses which still have the old wooden doors.

"They are the original ones and they are leaking.

"There are 23 doors that still need doing

By ANGELA

Chief reporter

to finish it off." He added: "I would also like to thank Mr Pear for his help in putting our petition forward to the council."

Former ward councillor Mr suggested the petition when former constituents asked for his help.

He hit the streets with Wessex MP Emma Smith as a Labour party member and found people were worried about the security of their doors.

"I had a door programme in full swing," said Mr Lear. "The last scheme I had passed was July Avenue on the same estate."

"I didn't get re-elected and it was up to the new councillors to deal with what they wanted to put forward."

"No schemes were put forward from any of the councillors in . . . The residents were told there was no money available for doors this year."

He added: "The houses are some of the oldest in the ward and many of the doors are the originals from 60 years ago."

7th July 2004

Housing Investment / Planned Maintenance Programme

3. The total budget allocation to the Community Area Forums for 2005/2006, to support improvements to Council homes amounts to £2850,000. Individual allocations to each of the Forums are based on the number of Council homes within the areas. In addition to enable the Council to meet our targets for Decent Homes, tenant led schemes and allow the Forum to respond to community issues the budgets for each of the Forums was divided into 3 areas:

- Discretionary
- PVCu Doors
- Decent Homes

4. The Housing Investment Programme total allocation to this Forum is £681,046. This allocation has been sub-divided into the 3 budget headings. This Forum's budgets are:

Budget Item	100% (£)	Committed (£)	Balance (£)
Discretionary	£99,423	£76876	£22547
PVCu Doors	£99,423	£99,423	Nil
Decent Homes	£482,200	£482,200	Nil
Total	£681046	£482,200	£22547

SHOWS NO MONEY AVAILABLE

5. Appendix 1 lists those schemes within their budget headings previously agreed by the Forum and their progress to date. Appendix 2 lists schemes for consideration.

Management of Empty Homes

6. A Key National Performance Indicator is the number of empty homes. The Council are obliged to monitor and report on the rental loss of empty homes. With this in mind the letting of empty homes is a priority of the Service.

APPENDIX 2

HOUSING INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2005/2006
IMPROVEMENT SCHEMES FOR CONSIDERATION

5

Ward	Scheme	Cost (£)	Date Agreed	Date Ordered	Date Start	Date End	Comment
EW1	June Ave, upcv doors	£14,404					

f 3

5

Praise for ex-councillor

MAY I take this opportunity to write on behalf of the residents of ~~June~~ Avenue to thank our former councillor, ~~Lear~~, for all his help during our recent campaign to persuade the council to install UPVC doors to own homes.

Given the fact that ~~Lear~~ is no longer our councillor, he could have turned his back on my request for help, but he didn't.

On behalf of the residents in ~~June~~ Avenue, thanks ~~C. Lear~~

Mr Abbott
June Avenue,
EastWessex

WRITE TO: The Editor

Gazette,

26 July 2004

Fighting for improvements

IT seems people power has touched a sore point with Mr Smith

I make no apology for helping residents in ~~June~~ Avenue with their fight for new uPVC doors.

However, I do stand by my claims, which the Progressive's proposed in the council chamber, that there should be no monies allocated to local community forums in future years for housing schemes through the Housing Improvement Programme.

This would have meant that across ~~East~~ ~~Wessex~~, the uPVC door programmes, kitchen renewal schemes and fencing projects would have been cancelled.

While the Labour Council rejected Coun ~~Smith~~'s crack-pot proposal, the residents of ~~Whapton~~ also refused me a mandate to continue the work in improving the council stock.

That was their right and, as a democrat, I respect their decision.

But it is not for the ~~Friday~~ or ~~Box~~ councillors to propose schemes for ~~Whapton~~ their job is to fight for their own patch.

It is Coun ~~Smith~~'s job, along with his worthy brothers Couns ~~and~~ to fight for Harton.

Their inaction has meant that tenants in ~~Whapton~~ will have to wait longer for their improvements. That's not Labour's fault - it's the fault of the Progressive councillors.

Mr Lear
Wessex