

ENVIRONMENT AND ACCESS PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE**20 January 2005**Attendance:

Councillors:

Verney (Chairman) (P)

Bidgood (P)
Busher (P)
de Peyer (P)
Higgins (P)
Jackson (P)Jeffs (P)
Love (P)
Mather (P)
Nunn (P)
WrightDeputy Members

Councillor Beckett (Standing Deputy for Councillor Wright)

Others in Attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Beveridge (Portfolio Holder for Planning)

Others in Attendance who did not address the meeting:

Councillor Davies

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 1 December 2004, be approved and adopted.

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

During the public participation period of the meeting, Councillor Bidgood spoke on a number of traffic issues which had been raised by his constituents. He requested that the following suggestions be further investigated:

- The 40mph speed limit along Church Lane, Colden Common be reduced to 30mph.
- The possibility of a footpath linking Colden Common to the Itchen Navigation Canal Walk along Kiln Lane.
- The possibility of reducing the excessive number of street signs in Twyford village centre.
- The possibility of increasing the size of the car park in Twyford village centre.

- That there be a comprehensive review of the traffic flow and direction through Winchester Town centre.
- That the Council consider requesting the Winchester Railway Station to consider increasing the number of short-stay car parking spaces for people picking up passengers.

In response, the Chairman and the Director of Development Services noted Councillor Bidgood's comments.

3. **DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT: BUDGET MONITORING APRIL – NOVEMBER 2004**

(Report EA47 refers)

The Committee considered a report which set out the expenditure and main variances against the budget profile for the Development Services Department in the period April-November 2004, apart from the Estates Service whose budget would be considered by the Central Services Performance Improvement Committee. Further to the report, the Director of Development Services explained that the first in a probable series of increases in planning fees from April 2005 were likely to generate an additional income of £110,000 during 2005/06. During the same period, he added that it was likely that the Council would receive £250,000 in Planning Delivery Grants.

The Director confirmed that errors had been made in the calculation of the current year's Planning Delivery Grant, but as these were not significant enough to have effected the level of Grant which was received by the Council, it was unlikely that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (OPDM) would request the return of any this Grant.

In response to questions, the Director explained that the promotion of concessionary travel tokens had been similar to previous years, but that he would investigate the reasons why some people had not renewed their entitlement.

Members also noted the increased workload of the Building Control Team despite an increasing trend for commercial developers to contract private Building Control expertise.

RESOLVED:

That the Development Services Department budget monitoring variances for the period April to November 2004/05 be noted.

4. **DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT: PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT THIRD QUARTER 2004/05**

(Report EA48 refers)

The report set out the performance monitoring information against the 2004/05 Business Plan Actions and against both Best Value and Key Local Performance Indicators.

Members noted that the planning performance outcomes continued to miss the ODPM's targets and the Director of Development Services updated the Committee to advise that the BVPI figures to January had improved to 46% of major applications being determined within 13 weeks and 51.4% of minor and 76.6% of other applications being determined within 8 weeks. However, the Director advised that

these results had resulted in Council being identified as a standards authority and it would therefore have to submit an action plan for improvement to the ODPM.

Whilst commenting on the good quality of work achieved by the Development Control Teams, the Committee noted that the principal cause of the poor performance was the high turnover and shortage of planning officers. The Director outlined a number of initiatives that had been undertaken to improve performance, such as attracting overseas planners, a more efficient system of prioritising work, new computer and scanning systems and more information on Planning Development Control agendas.

The Committee also considered the large underspend from the Open Spaces Budget and the Director agreed to better promote the availability of this Fund to Parish Councils and to provide examples of what the money could be spent on, together with guidance on best practice regarding time limits for expenditure from the Fund. Members also considered the role of the Open Space Strategy and it was agreed that this should also be sent to Ward Members as well as Parish Councils.

RESOLVED:

That the performance outcomes against the Business Plan actions and performance indicator results for April–November 2004 be noted.

5. **PLANNING ENFORCEMENT: WORKLOAD (JULY-SEPTEMBER 2004 AND OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2004)**

(Report EA49 refers)

The Committee considered the report which detailed the workload and performance of the Planning Enforcement Team.

During discussion, it was agreed to investigate reducing the number of categories of Enforcement Cases sent to Members and Parish Councils.

RESOLVED:

That the enforcement workload changes and performance for the period July-December 2004 be noted.

6. **SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT - PLANNING GRANTS INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP**

(Report EA51 refers)

This item had not been notified for inclusion on the agenda within the statutory deadline. The Chairman agreed to accept the item onto the agenda as a matter requiring urgent consideration, so that the conclusions of the last meeting of the Informal Scrutiny Group could be considered and reported onto Cabinet for its deliberations on the 2005/06 budget.

The Committee agreed to consider the item in conjunction with report EA50 below.

7. **PLANNING GRANTS INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP: PLANNING GRANTS 2005/06**

(Report EA50 refers)

Members considered the report which set out the work and conclusions of the Planning Grants Informal Scrutiny Group. The Group had recommended a method of

scoring the performance of the Groups and Projects that had applied for Planning Grants against the Council's statutory obligations and corporate strategies.

During discussion, it was noted that the report recommended that the Environmental Improvement Grant should receive no grant ("nil") and that the desirable provision of Historic Building Grants was a recommended additional £5,000 pa.

The Group had used this assessment matrix to help identify priorities and possible options for savings, as set out in Appendix 1 of the supplementary report. The Committee agreed a number of principles which it recommended Cabinet take into account in deciding the planning grants budget:

1. It was essential that funding for the Historic Buildings Grants be maintained at no less than £70,000 pa (plus future allowances for inflation), but £75,000 - £100,000 was recommended. Any lower level of funding could be counter-productive because of the increased likelihood of the Council needing to serve Repairs Notices, and potentially Compulsory Purchase Orders, to save poorly-maintained listed buildings.
2. The work of some of the groups were viewed as providing essential services, in particular the East Hampshire Area of Natural Beauty Project, the Hampshire Wildlife Trust (management of City Council-owned Sites of Special Scientific Interest) and the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre. Payments made to these organisations should, therefore, be seen as payment for the provision of specific services that the Council would otherwise have a duty to provide, rather than grants.
3. The Council should fund the restoration of St Faiths Meadow, an SSSI which the Council owned. The Town Forum has agreed to fund £5000 per annum for 3 years and it was estimated that a further £7000 per annum would be needed for this restoration.
4. The following countryside organisations and projects had great strengths in developing environmental projects with local communities, and grants should be maintained, if necessary by cutting back rather than omitting funding from the organisations. These were agreed in priority order as set out in Appendix 1 as:
 - i) The Hampshire Wildlife Trust
 - ii) The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (whose projects, like the Hampshire Wildlife Trust, involved the local community)
 - iii) The Forest of Bere Project (which fell predominately within the Winchester District and, as it was supported by adjoining local authorities, it was considered that the Council should bear a share of this cost).
5. That Environmental Improvement Grants, whilst not an essential service, should continue to be offered if possible, with a budget of £25,000 - £40,000.

The Committee then considered each of the grant areas in turn and in regard to Historic Buildings Grants, it was suggested that increased public access could be co-ordinated through the Heritage Open Days which was administered by the Tourism Section.

At the conclusion of the debate, during which Members discussed the savings against the wider context of the Council's total spending on administration, the proposed level of grants were recommended to Cabinet for approval as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet approve the priorities set out in paragraph 2.1 (and repeated above) and Appendix 1 to the report (EA51) as the basis for allocating the Planning Grants Budget for the 2005/06 financial year.

8. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**
(Report PS153 refers)

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Work Programme be noted.

9. **DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Committee expressed its unanimous thanks to the outgoing Director of Development Services, Robin Cooper, for his hard work and advice to the Committee and wished him luck in his new appointment at Medway Council.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 8.55pm.

Chairman