

CABINET

7 February 2006

EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF PRINCIPAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD 16 JANUARY 2006 AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE HELD 23 JANUARY 2006

REPORT OF CITY SECRETARY AND SOLICITOR

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RECENT REFERENCES:

None

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report sets out the relevant minute extracts from the meetings of the Principal Scrutiny Committee held on 16 January 2006 and Personnel Committee held 23 January 2006 that have been referred to Cabinet for its consideration.

RECOMMENDATION:

To consider and determine the matters set out the minute extracts below.

CABINET7 February 2006EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF PRINCIPAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD 16 JANUARY 2006 AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE HELD 23 JANUARY 2006REPORT OF CITY SECRETARY AND SOLICITOR1. PRINCIPAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 16 JANUARY 20061.1 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY
(Report PS201 refers)

The Committee noted that this item had been previously deferred at the meeting of the Committee held on 5 December 2005.

Although noting that there were some initial delays in the implementation of the Strategy's Improvement Plan, Members welcomed the Chief Executive's reports of progress in the compilation of a Media Handbook; improvements to the Council's website and in particular, the production of an on-line newsletter for Parish Councils. Members were of the view that a similar online newsletter would be of benefit to County Councillors.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the 'Perspectives' magazine should continue to be representative of the work of the Council in the whole District and should also endeavour to identify issues of local relevance across the District. Further to a Member's request, it was also agreed that a full list of the Council's publications be circulated to Members of the Committee for information.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet's attention be drawn to the following matters raised by the Committee in their consideration of the Corporate Communications Strategy:

- (i) That production of an on-line newsletter for Parish Councils be particularly progressed as soon as possible.
- (ii) That a similar on line newsletter be also produced for County Councillors.

1.2 THIRD QUARTER PERFORMANCE MONITORING – LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
(Report PS212 refers)

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Councillor Campbell, Leader of the Council.

The Leader responded to a number of questions and clarified issues regarding the achievement of agreed corporate objectives.

Following some expressions of concern over the interpretation of the progress indicators within the appendices, the Chief Executive acknowledged that any changes to the agreed timetable should be explained.

Referring to Appendix 2, Corporate Dashboard, Members noted with concern the performance indicator for days sick per member of staff. Following discussion, it was agreed that as the figures for Quarter 3 (October – December 2005) were not available in time for publication of the report, these should be verbally reported to the meeting of the Personnel Committee on 23 January 2006. Furthermore, it was agreed that a report on sickness absence be provided to a future meeting of the Personnel Committee.

Also referring to Appendix 2, Corporate Dashboard, the Leader explained that the delays in processing changes in circumstances for Housing Benefits claims were as a result to revisions to associated national legislation and delays with computer software updates being available. The targets would be revised to reflect the lengthened process. It was agreed that the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources be encouraged to continue to monitor the position.

RESOLVED:

That the Leader and the Chief Executive have regard to the issues as identified from the third quarter performance monitoring as detailed above and in particular:

(a) That the sickness per member of staff figure for Quarter 3 (October – December 2005) be verbally reported to the meeting of the Personnel Committee on 23 January 2006 and that a report on sickness absence be also provided to a future meeting of the Personnel Committee.

(b) That the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources be encouraged to continue to monitor the performance for determinations of “Housing Benefits Changes in Circumstances”.

1.3 CONSULTATION ON CORPORATE STRATEGY AND REVENUE BUDGET 2006/07

(Report PS211 refers)

The Committee also referred to the reports on the Roll Forward of Corporate Strategy (Report CAB1185 refers) and Revenue Budget (Report CAB1171 refers) as part of their consideration of this item.

It was noted that Report PS211 additionally contained further information on four issues considered by the Social Issues Scrutiny Panel as part of the budget process that had been referred to the Committee.

(i) Homecheck

It was acknowledged that as Homecheck provided a valuable service to vulnerable residents, Cabinet should revisit potential alternative partnership funding before considering cessation of the service and identification of this as a saving in the 2006/07 budget.

(ii) Health for All Budget underspend

The Committee supported the proposals to reduce permanently the budget to achieve the proposed saving.

(iii) Meals on Wheels

The Director of Communities answered a number of questions regarding aspects of the service and confirmed that there was no statutory obligation for the Council to make financial contributions.

It was agreed that the Meals on Wheels service provides a valued service to local residents and that it should be maintained and enhanced where possible, within budgetary constraints. It was also agreed that Members should be party to the outcome of the County Council's impending review of the service and negotiations in June 2006 regarding the new contract for the provision of meals. Therefore, the Committee supported the officers' suggestion that consideration of potential savings be deferred until the 2007/08 financial year.

(iv) Discretionary Non Domestic Rates (NNDR) payments

In respect of this item, Councillors Beckett and Clohosey declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest as the community facilities that they were involved in were in receipt of the discretionary payment. They both spoke and voted thereon.

It was agreed that the changes to the policy following the initial review of the scheme were acceptable; however there should be no further recommendation for changes at this time. The savings already achieved were therefore accepted as identified savings.

RESOLVED:

1. That Cabinet note the decisions of the Committee regarding the matters referred to the Committee by the Social Issues Scrutiny Panel as set out in detail above and summarised below:

(i) Homecheck

That Cabinet revisit potential alternative partnership funding before considering cessation of the service as a saving in the 2006/07 budget.

(ii) Health for All Budget underspend

That the proposals to permanently reduce the budget to achieve the proposed saving be supported.

(iii) Meals on Wheels

That Cabinet be advised that the Meals on Wheels service provides a valued service to local residents and that it should be maintained and enhanced where possible, within budgetary constraints.

(iv) Discretionary Non Domestic rates (NNDR) payments

That the savings already achieved following review of associated Council policies be accepted but Cabinet be informed that the Committee considers there is no need for a further review at this time.

1.4 **ROLL FORWARD OF CORPORATE STRATEGY 2006/09**
(Report CAB1185 refers)

The Committee noted that that Cabinet would consider this report at its meeting on 18 January 2006.

Following reference to the draft Corporate Strategy as set out as an Appendix to the report, the following suggestions for changes to the Strategy were agreed:

Safer and More Inclusive Communities

- (i) Although accepting that the values promoted in the Strategy were in headline form, the Committee commented that residents' access to services and cultural opportunities (especially in some rural areas) could be hindered by a lack of public transport. Therefore Cabinet was requested to give higher priority to investigating matters related to this, including associated subsidy provision.
- (ii) A Member suggested that the following sentence in the 'Safer and More Inclusive Communities' Section be supplemented by the words in italics (and suggested alternative wording rejected):

'Improve health outcomes by encouraging more active *and healthy* lives.'

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet have regard to the following comments:

- (i) That it bear in mind the recent Hampshire County Council reductions in public transport subsidy when considering its approach to transport strategy.
- (ii) That, in general, the original wording of the strategy contained in CAB1185 is preferred, rather than the suggested alternatives.

1.5 **REVENUE BUDGET 2007/09**
(Report CAB1171 refers)

The above 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, because of the necessity for the Committee to comment on the proposals in advance of Cabinet on 18 January 2006 and Council on 23 February 2006.

Members noted that the Scrutiny Panels had already commented upon specific areas of relevance of the proposals for the Budget and that elements referred by the Social

Issues Scrutiny Panel to the Committee had been dealt with as part of the Committee's consideration of Report PS211 Consultation on Corporate Strategy and Revenue Budget 2006/07, above.

The Committee discussed whether Cabinet should be requested to investigate a rise in Council tax nearer in line with current inflation (closer to 3 per cent) as opposed to the 4.9 per cent as included in projections detailed in the report. However, a consequence of this was likely to be increased use of the Council's Reserves, the majority of Members rejected this proposal. Instead it was agreed that Cabinet should base their discussion on the projections given in the report and be mindful of the Committee's observations that it would be preferable to look for savings in expenditure rather than use of Reserves.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee suggest that in indicating which of the growth and savings proposals for 2006/07 should be incorporated in the Revenue Budget 2006/07, Cabinet looks for savings in expenditure rather than use of Reserves.

1.6 **DEPOT SERVICES CONTRACT – MONITORING AND PERFORMANCE UPDATE**
(Report PS217 refers)

The Committee noted that the report was also to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting to be held on 18 January 2006.

It was agreed that to assist Members in their consideration of the matters, improvements to graphical representation of performance should be made where possible.

RESOLVED:

1. That performance information as set out in the report be noted.
2. That six monthly performance reports be now produced, commencing at the meeting of the Committee on 5 June 2006.

2. **PERSONNEL COMMITTEE – 23 JANUARY 2006**

2.1 **NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDEN SCHEME - EVALUATION**
(Report CAB1157 refers)

The Director of Communities reminded Members that the above Report had also been considered by both Cabinet and the Winchester Town Forum on 18 January 2006. These meetings had discussed the scheme in detail and in summary, supported the proposals for its further development by increasing the establishment by two FTEs (full time equivalents). The Director also advised that the proposed increase of two Wardens would lead to greater efficiencies as the current team of three did not allow for 'paired working'.

As Chairman of the Town Forum, Councillor Rees reported that in supporting the proposals in principle, the Forum had agreed that the posts should only be partially funded from the Winchester Town Account (by an additional sum of £25,000).

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the growth bid of £60,000 being approved as part of the budget process, an increase to the establishment of two scale 4 FTEs as set out in the report, be approved.

2.2 **HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT BUDGET 2006/07 AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING TO NOVEMBER 2005**

(Report PER95 refers)

The Director of Human Resources circulated an update on performance indicator BVPI12 (numbers of days sick per member of staff for the Third Quarter 2005/06). This information had been requested by Principal Scrutiny Committee on 16 January 2006 as part of its consideration of the Third Quarter Performance Monitoring – Leader Of The Council (Report PS212 refers) and it was agreed that it should be verbally reported to the next Personnel Committee. The figures showed a slight improvement to the previous figure for the Second Quarter.

Following questions, it was confirmed that there were no general trends apparent regarding long-term sickness levels. The Director also reported on the success to date of new procedures for the management of sickness absence, including return to work interviews. It was noted that there will be further enhancements to the reporting and monitoring of sickness and absence with the introduction of the new Human Resource and Payroll system.

RESOLVED:

That no issues on the detailed budget and revised budget for 2005/06 and performance information be brought to the attention of Cabinet for consideration.

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 – Exempt Minute Extract from Personnel Committee held 23 January 2006