

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL**12 July 2006****Attendance:****Councillors:**

Saunders (Chairman) (P)

Beveridge (P)
Busher (P)
Godfrey (P)
Higgins (P)
Howell (P)
Jackson (P)

Mather (P)
Rees (P)
Weston (P)
Wagner (P)
Wright (P)

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Pearson (Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health and Safety)
Councillor Verney

Others in attendance who did not address the meeting:

Councillor Learney

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Lipscomb (Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport).

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**RESOLVED:**

That Councillor Busher be appointed Vice-Chairman for the 2006/07 Municipal Year.

3. TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS**RESOLVED:**

That future meetings of the Panel commence at 6.30pm for the 2006/07 Municipal Year and that the timetable of scheduled meetings for 2006/07 Municipal Year be noted.

4. MINUTES**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the previous meeting held 13 March 2006 be approved and adopted.

5. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions asked or statements made.

6. **UPDATE ON BRITISH MOTORCROSS GRAND PRIX, MATTERLEY ESTATE, WINCHESTER**
(Oral Report)

The Director of Communities gave a presentation focussing on the Environmental Health and Safety aspects of the recent event. He acknowledged that there were planning issues that still needed to be resolved, but these did not fall under the remit of this Scrutiny Panel.

In general, the event had gone well and there were no complaints received about noise levels or the amount of dust generated from the track. The organisers were intending to hold the World Motorcross Grand Prix at the site in September 2006.

He outlined a number of issues that had arisen and lessons that would be learnt for any future event, namely:

- Improvements required regarding Traffic Management. The use of the A272 should be minimised, with traffic directed along the A31 instead (as for the 'Hi Fi' festival);
- Improvements required to ensure adequate separation of vehicles (i.e. mainly motorbikes etc) and pedestrians on site.
- Licensing and entertainment issues;
- Improvements required to signing of the site and its layout (including relocation of campsite – there had been a few complaints regarding the smells from barbeques);
- Improvements to litter clearance arrangements;
- Possibly reduce the level of Environmental Health staffing on site;
- Improvements required to event liaison on site;
- Improvements required to access arrangements for staff;
- Organisers should be required to allocate more resources for future events and improve their management structure.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chairman thanked the Director of Communities for a very interesting and informative presentation.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Verney raised a number of concerns regarding the high level of traffic using the A272 and also the dangers caused by pedestrians walking along this road to and from the venue. He also mentioned the noise in nearby villages caused by motorbikes travelling to the site.

In response to questions, the Director of Development confirmed that the event itself had not required planning permission. In addition, the size of the jumps actually used on site had been considerably reduced to that proposed in the relevant planning application (which had been refused by the Planning Development Control Committee).

The Director of Communities advised that the estimate was that between 16,000 and 20,000 people had attended the event. In addition, the Director of Development confirmed that it had resulted in a significant increase in hotel bookings in the area and this was likely to increase further for the World event.

RESOLVED:

That the information presented regarding the British Motorcross Grand Prix at Matterley Estate, Winchester be noted.

7. **PLANNING AND TRANSPORT PORTFOLIO – FOURTH QUARTER 2005/06
PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND 2005/06 FINANCIAL OUTTURN**
(Report EN17 refers)

Councillor Jackson declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest in respect of this item and Report EN18 as she owned a business that was involved in cycle training. She remained in the room, spoke and voted.

The Director of Development responded to detailed questions regarding the information contained in the Report.

One Member expressed concern about the reduction in the number of dwelling completions. The Director of Development explained that this was due to the rate of house building generally slowing down, and particularly on the site at Knowle. Whilst acknowledging that this was frustrating, he advised that there was little the Council could do to improve this situation. However, he did not foresee that this slow down would cause any major difficulties at the current time, although the situation would be carefully monitored. The Director of Development confirmed that figures showing the correlation between applications granted and dwellings completed were available and could be supplied to Members on request.

In response to questions regarding Local Area Design Statements (LADs), the Director of Development explained that delays had occurred due to the officers being involved in the finalisation of the Local Plan Review. As this had now been adopted it was anticipated the situation would improve over the next few months.

The Director of Development responded to questions about the backlog of enforcement cases and explained that this had occurred due to recent staffing vacancies.

The Director of Development confirmed that the awarding of the Planning Delivery Grant ceased in its current form at the end of March 2007 and the Government had yet to announce what, if anything, would replace it.

A number of Members expressed concern about the continuing problems caused by IT difficulties in relation to the Planning service, and requested that the relevant IT officer be invited to the next meeting to explain what steps were being taken to improve the situation. It was agreed that a report giving more details on this subject be submitted to the next Panel meeting.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chairman congratulated the Head of Building Control on his Section's performance over the last financial year.

RESOLVED:

1. That the monitoring information contained in the Report be noted.

2. That a further report be submitted to the next Panel meeting setting out the current difficulties with the Development Control IT Systems and the steps being taken or proposed to alleviate these problems as a matter of urgency.

3. That Cabinet be asked to give attention to the following issues:

- (i) The backlog of planning enforcement cases;
- (ii) The need to resolve, as a matter of urgency, difficulties caused to the Development Control Service and its customers using the public access portal by the continuing problems with the various IT Systems;.

8. **PLANNING AND TRANSPORT PORTFOLIO – FIRST QUARTER 2006/07 PERFORMANCE MONITORING**
(Report EN18 refers)

The Director of Development responded to detailed questions regarding the information contained in the Report.

One Member congratulated the Planning Team for their improved performance on dealing with planning applications in 2005/06, but queried why this level of performance had dropped off in the first quarter? The Director of Development explained that this had been due to a significant number of experienced staff leaving in the team which validated planning applications. Although these posts had now been filled, the new staff were still relatively inexperienced and had not yet managed to work through the backlog that had previously built up.

One Member requested that quarterly information be supplied to the Panel on the number of planning appeals against Council decisions that had been successful. The Director of Development confirmed that this information was supplied to the Planning Development Control Committee but could also be reported to the Panel if required. This was agreed.

In response to questions, the Director of Development advised that the new Major Development Team would be operating from 1 August 2006. It consisted of four officers: two transferred from other Planning teams and two new members of staff.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the monitoring information contained in the Report be noted.
- 2. That further information be requested on the following for future monitoring reports:
 - (i) Quarterly figures on the number of planning appeals which were successful against Planning Development Control Committee decision;

9. **ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO HOLDERS REPORT – END OF YEAR PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

(Report EN19 refers)

The Portfolio Holder and the Director of Communities responded to detailed questions regarding the information contained in the Report.

The Director of Communities advised that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs had not yet signed off Winchester's Air Quality Action Plan, but it was not anticipated that there would be any problems with the Council's submission.

Councillor Pearson answered questions in relation to the roll out of the Alternate Weekly Pilot across the District. The Panel noted that a major factor in its success would be the education of households in relation to encouraging more recycling and also explaining what items could and could not be recycled at the current time. In this regard, Councillor Pearson advised that the City Council and Project Integra were both running publicity campaigns and the Council had employed recycling advisers to target specific 'hard-to-reach' households.

One Member commented that the predicted recycling rate under the new scheme of between 35 and 40 per cent was too optimistic. However, the Director of Communities believed that this was achievable as the results of the pilot scheme had indicated a recycling level of 38 per cent.

RESOLVED:

That the monitoring information contained in the Report be noted

10. **ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO HOLDERS REPORT – FIRST QUARTER PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

(Report EN20 refers)

Councillor Busher declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest in respect of this item because of her livestock business. She remained in the room, spoke and voted thereon.

In response to questions about the level of costs detailed in Appendix 2 of the Report, Councillor Pearson explained that although high, those relating to the roll-out of the recycling scheme were within budget and involved a significant level of one-off start-up costs (such as purchase of new larger bins).

With regard to the food safety team, the Director of Communities explained that the reduction in numbers of officers on this team had led to difficulties maintaining the inspection targets. He mentioned that the Department of Trade and Industry would be considering whether the whole inspection regime could be moved to a more risk-based approach in the future, but these changes had not yet been agreed. One Member suggested that the potential impact of delays in inspecting food premises could be highlighted in the relevant risk register. This was agreed together with the requirement to develop the appropriate action plan to manage the risk.

One Member commented that performance on both air quality and to the District's street scene were dependant upon full cooperation from the County Council. Councillor Pearson confirmed he was continuing discussions with relevant Members and Officers at the County Council to seek to achieve this.

Some Members also commented on the impact of the proposed development at Silver Hill on traffic within Winchester and consequentially on air quality issues. However, it was noted that applications for the Silver Hill area were due to be determined by the Planning Development Control Committee this autumn, and this would include related traffic management issues. The Chief Executive also reminded the Panel that Cabinet was taking the lead on the delivery of the scheme and Principal Scrutiny Committee was responsible for over-viewing the project as a whole. However, once a decision on the planning applications had been made, it would be possible to investigate whether any individual elements of any scheme should be referred to this Panel.

RESOLVED:

1. That the monitoring information contained in the Report be noted.
2. That Cabinet be asked to give attention to the following issues:
 - (i) The potential delays in food safety inspection caused by staff cuts made in the previous financial year.

11. **APPOINTMENTS TO INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUPS**
(Report EN16 refers)

The Panel noted that that work on the proposed South Downs National Park was currently on hold whilst the Government investigated a technical difficulty with the legislation regarding the establishment of the New Forest National Park. Members therefore agreed that it was too early to establish an Informal Scrutiny Group to carry out an in-depth study on the South Downs park at this stage.

RESOLVED:

1. That a Street Scene Issues Informal Scrutiny Group be established to carry out an in-depth study on matters related to the Street Scene Issues element of the Sustainable Environment Audit, with membership as follows (terms of reference to be agreed at a future meeting):

Councillors Busher, Mather, Jackson, Wagner and Weston.

2. That the Open Space Informal Scrutiny Group not be reappointed and the proposed South Downs National Park Informal Scrutiny Group not be appointed at this time.

12. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**
(Report PS226 refers)

RESOLVED:

1. That the Scrutiny Work Programme, as set out on the reverse of the agenda, and as extracted from Report PS226, be noted.
2. That the work of the Scrutiny Panel be agreed subject to the following additions:

- (i) The Environment Protection Team Leader, Mrs S Blazdell, to be invited to the 17 October 2006 Panel to give a presentation on the use of slurry on fields;
- (ii) Also at the 17 October meeting, a report on Development Control IT issues (as outlined under Report EN17 above);
- (iii) A focus session on agricultural and rural issues to be arranged for the 27 November 2006 meeting and representatives from the National Farming Union and the Council for the Protection of Rural England be invited to attend;
- (iv) That further consideration be given to the appropriateness of the Panel scrutinising aspects of any Silver Hill development at the relevant time.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 10.00pm

Chairman