

LOCAL ECONOMY SCRUTINY PANEL

13 July 2006

Attendance:

Councillors:

Cooper (Chairman) (P)

Anthony (P)
Goodall (P)
Godfrey (P)
Love (P)
Macmillan (P)

Maynard
Pearce (P)
Rees
Spender (P)
Stephens (P)
Verney (P)

Deputy Members in attendance:

Councillor Cook (Standing Deputy for Councillor Maynard)

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Stallard (Portfolio Holder for Culture, Heritage and Sport)
Councillor Beckett (Leader and Portfolio Holder for Economy and Tourism)

Others in attendance who did not address the meeting:

Councillors Beveridge, Learney, Saunders and Tait

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Maynard.

2. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Spender 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 the
2006/07 Municipal Year be noted.

4. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 March 2006 be
approved and adopted.

5. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions asked or statements made.

6. **ECONOMY AND TOURISM PORTFOLIO – FIRST QUARTER PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2006/07**

(Report LE27 refers)

7. **ECONOMY AND TOURISM PORTFOLIO – FOURTH QUARTER PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2005/06**

(Report LE29 refers)

The Panel considered the above reports together.

Councillor Beckett (Leader and Portfolio Holder for Economy and Tourism) updated the Panel on developments since he took responsibility for the Portfolio in May 2006. These, in summary, were as set out below:

The Winchester Business Hub initiative (Report WTF68 refers) had been broadly welcomed by the local business community across the District and would be renamed as the “Winchester District Enterprise Centre”. A detailed report would be presented to Cabinet in July and it was noted that the Centre had been discussed with Business Link, although they were not formal partners of the scheme. It was anticipated that the Centre would open during 2007.

In response to questions, it was explained that efforts would be made to promote Winchester as a wireless town, including a “hotspot” at the Enterprise Centre, and that at least one commercial business was already engaged in establishing a network of these around the town.

Councillor Beckett was keen to speed the progression of the Winchester Business Improvement District (or BID, Report WTF69 refers) with a timetable for action. The Enterprise Centre would form a headquarters for the BID. Whilst officers would be supporting the BID project, it was noted that it had to be led by the business community.

Councillor Beckett had attended the Winchester Business Excellence Awards, the British Guild of Travel Writers’ annual field trip in Winchester, and the Rural Business Challenge Scheme. He had met with the Chairman of the Hampshire Police Authority who had agreed that, if possible, the relocation of the Police Headquarters should remain in the Winchester District. He had also met with traders in Parchment Street and The Square in Winchester; the Vice-Chancellor of Winchester University (where a number of opportunities for joint working had arisen, including shared objectives for the Masters’ Lodge and the proposed new Bar End sports facilities); Sparsholt College and Marwell Zoological Park.

During debate, the Director of Development stated that a report on the Winnall Industrial Estate was currently being compiled and would be published within the next few weeks. Similarly, progress on the annual skills conference would be reported to a future meeting of the Panel.

Concerns were raised regarding the failure to implement the on-line accommodation booking facility at the Tourism VisitWinchester website. The Panel noted that its introduction had been delayed because of IT problems, but these were likely to be overcome in the next few weeks with the recent re-launch of the website and that a new project team had been established to drive progress on this target forward.

The Panel also noted that the Year of Sculpture had been postponed to 2007 and the Director explained that was because the higher profile of the artist likely to exhibit had significantly increased the cost, technical requirements and administrative support required from officers associated with the project. The outcome of major bids to Arts Council England, South East and the Heritage Lottery Fund were awaited.

Members discussed the success of the recent Motocross British Grand Prix held at the Matterley Bowl, Winchester which had generated relatively few complaints and was likely to have aided local businesses and tourism. Councillor Beckett reported that he had underlined to the promoter of the event, the importance of submitting the relevant planning application as soon as possible in advance of the proposed International Grand Prix, which was scheduled to be held on the site in September 2006. If this application was granted planning permission, the Council would be able to fully support the promotion of the event.

RESOLVED:

That the Reports be noted.

8. **CULTURE, HERITAGE AND SPORT PORTFOLIO – FIRST QUARTER PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2006/07**
(Report LE25 refers)
9. **CULTURE, HERITAGE AND SPORT PORTFOLIO – FOURTH QUARTER PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2005/06**
(Report LE30 refers)

The Panel considered the above Reports together.

Councillor Stallard (Portfolio Holder for Culture, Heritage and Sport) updated the Panel on developments since she took responsibility for the Portfolio in May 2006. These, in summary, were as set out below:

Councillor Stallard had attended the “Back the Track” Corporate Relay Race to support the proposed running track at Bar End, Winchester; a meeting of SHIPS (South Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton Strategic Arts Forum) which had expressed an interest in holding its next annual conference at Winchester; SPAAs (Sports and Physical Activity Alliance) which sought to maximise use of sports facilities in the area; the Hyde 900 Action Group; and the Guildhall staff and caterers (where regular future meetings were planned). She had been on a tour of historic buildings in Winchester led by conservation officers, which was also attended by the Chairmen of this Panel and the Planning Development Control Committee.

In addition to these engagements, Councillor Stallard had also assessed grant applications to the Community Chest and had requested that its criteria be reviewed and updated.

During debate, the Panel discussed the performance of the Meadowside Leisure Centre at Whiteley. In response to comments, the Director of Communities explained that a new monitoring system, similar to that used at the River Park Leisure Centre, Winchester would be introduced to more accurately measure the Centre’s use. Following discussion, the Director agreed to investigate and inform members of the Panel why the income for May 2006 had decreased whilst the throughput had increased, relative to other months.

The Director also agreed to investigate what measures the River Park Leisure Centre had undertaken to compensate its members for the loss of facilities during its recent refurbishment.

With regard to the Guildhall catering contract, the Director commented that although the new contractor (Fosters) had been disappointed by their returns at the start of the contract, it was hoped that a clearer marketing strategy and quarterly management meetings would help restore their expected profits.

The Panel noted the proposal to make the Museum Service's collection more accessible via the web and that it was part of the E-Government programme. As preparation for this, the description of the entire catalogue was being reviewed and rewritten to make it more accessible to the public.

In response to a Member's comment, the Director explained that the VisitWinchester website had already carried advertisements and sponsorship notices for local interests and that, in future, it was likely that the corporate and tourism websites would sell merchandise from the museums and the Tourist Information Centre.

The Panel also discussed the promotion and accessibility of the Theatre Royal and INTECH.

RESOLVED:

That the Reports be noted.

10. **REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE CONSERVATION TEAM**
(Report LE26 refers)

Following debate, the Panel agreed that the Conservation Team had been under-resourced both in terms of the number of officers available to undertake the work and with regard to the suspended Historic Buildings Grants. The lack of available officers meant that work had been prioritised on targets relating to Listed Building Consents and planning applications affecting the historic environment. This had been at the expense of more strategic work, such as the production and review of Conservation Area Character Appraisals and Management Plans, which needed to be updated every five years. The suspended Historic Buildings Grant had compounded this by depriving owners of an incentive to preserve their buildings.

The Panel noted the comparative lack of Conservation Officers at Winchester and their high workload relative to other Local Authorities and agreed with the Report's synopsis that this was neither good for morale nor the long term well being of the District's historic environment.

During discussion, the Panel noted that whilst performance across the Development Directorate could be improved by better IT, it was unlikely to be improved by the appointment of trainees or non-independent consultants.

At the conclusion of debate, the Panel agreed the recommendations as set out in the Report, but delegated to the Director of Development (in consultation with the Chairman) authority to re-word Recommendation 3 in light of the Panel's discussion.

The Panel also agreed that, in light of the importance of the historic environment to the District, Cabinet be asked to appoint a “champion” for the historic environment, and suggested that the Portfolio for Culture and Heritage (Councillor Stallard) was best placed to fill this role.

RESOLVED:

1. That issues raised in the Report be noted.
2. That it be recommended to Cabinet that Councillor Stallard be appointed as the City Council’s Historic Environment Champion.

(The wording of the following recommendation had been delegated to the Director of Development, in consultation with the Chairman, to draft so as to reflect the Panel’s discussion)

3. That as the Panel recognised the quality of the work undertaken by the Conservation Team and the significance of conservation work to the well-being of the historic environment of the District, Cabinet be asked to give favourable consideration to providing additional resources in the next annual budget to support the work of the Conservation Team, through additional staffing and the reinstatement of Historic Building Grants, should resources allow.

11. **BIANNUAL REPORT OF THE WINCHESTER ARCHIVIST**

(Report LE28 refers)

RESOLVED:

That the Report be noted and that it be agreed that the service provided by the Winchester Archivist assisted in the delivery of the Council’s corporate aims and represents value for money for the community.

12. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

(Report PS226 refers)

Following discussion, the Panel agreed to recommend to Cabinet and Principal Scrutiny Committee the establishment of an Informal Scrutiny Group to review the Museum Service and develop an action plan for the Service. The membership of the Group was agreed as set out below. The Group’s terms of reference would be agreed at its first meeting.

The Chairman advised the Panel that he intended to discuss with the Head of Performance and Management a series of topics to provide a focus for each of the Panel’s future meetings.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Scrutiny Work Programme, as set out on the reverse of the agenda sheet, be noted.

2. That Cabinet and Principal Scrutiny Committee be recommended to approve the appointment of the Museum Service Review Informal Scrutiny Group, with the following membership: Councillors Cooper, Godfrey, Pearce and Spender.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 9.05pm

Chairman