

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL**2 August 2007****Attendance:**

Councillors:

Lipscomb (Chairman) (P)

Anthony (P)

Barratt (P)

Busher (P)

Fitzgerald (P)

Higgins (P)

Howell

Jackson (P)

Mather (P)

Saunders

Spender

Wright (P)

Deputy Members

Councillor Biggs and Cook (Standing Deputies for Councillors Howell and Spender respectively)

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:

Councillors Bell and Beveridge

1. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Committee met at The Chapel, West Downs Campus, Winchester where the Chairman welcomed to the meeting five members of the public and representatives of community groups.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Howell, Spender, Saunders and the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation, Councillor Wood.

3. TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED:

That future meetings of the Panel commence at 6.30pm for the 2007/08 Municipal Year and that the timetable of scheduled meetings for the 2007/08 Municipal Year be noted.

4. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held 12 March 2007 be approved and adopted.

5. **DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

Councillor Pearson (Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health and Safety) declared a personal and prejudicial interest due to his involvement as Cabinet Member in actions taken or proposed in the Reports outlined below.

However, the Panel asked the Portfolio Holder to remain in the meeting, under the provisions of Section 21(13)(a) of the Local Government Act 2000, in order that he could provide additional information to the Panel and/or answer questions.

6. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Anthony be appointed Vice-Chairman for the 2007/08 Municipal Year.

7. **WINCHESTER M3 INCIDENT MANAGEMENT AND REVISED REPORT**
(Report EN38 and EN42 refers)

Report EN42 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 as it contained accident data for the M3 motorway that complimented Report EN38.

The Panel considered the Reports together, which considered the traffic difficulties in Winchester that arise as a consequence of incidents on the M3 motorway.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr G Berresford (Highways Agency), Chief Inspector Bayntum and Mr C Laycock (Hampshire Traffic Police), Mr D Marklew (City of Winchester Trust), Mr A Weeks (Winchester Residents' Association) and Mr J Sawyer (North Hampshire Chamber of Commerce).

In his presentation to the Panel, Mr Marklew spoke of the need to minimise traffic that would be diverted through the centre of Winchester in the event of an incident on the M3 or A34. He suggested that this could be helped by the re-instatement of agreed diversionary routes marked by symbols, such as triangles or squares, on road signs. The Panel later noted that these symbols were called "secret signs". He added that it was particularly important that a route be agreed to carry traffic north-south around the town. Mr Marklew also commented on the problems generated by drivers' satellite navigation systems which appeared to automatically divert traffic through the town centre. However, he suggested that one of the principle causes of the town's traffic problems emanated from Junction 9 of the M3 which operated at near to full capacity. Finally, Mr Marklew questioned the proposed location of a Vehicle Messaging Sign (VMS) at North Walls.

However, in response to this concern, the Panel noted that from North Walls, drivers could be diverted to different junctions of the motorway.

Mr Sawyer stated that, from his perspective, he was unaware that congestion in central Winchester that resulted from incidents on the M3 or A34 had caused a major problem for Winchester's businesses. However, he agreed that there should be more VMSs around the town to help drivers and reduce congestion.

During his presentation, Mr Weeks suggested that an origin and destination survey should be undertaken of traffic in Winchester and that the results of this should be taken into account when drafting diversion routes.

Mr Berresford explained that the national guidance framework encouraged consultation between the Highway Agency and local highways authorities regarding diversion routes. The Highways Agency was currently discussing detailed operating agreements of diversion routes with the County Council and approximately 75% of the routes suggested by the Highways Agency had been accepted by the County. Once the diversion routes were agreed, he explained that the Highways Agency would supply this information to the network providers for the satellite navigation companies.

With reference to the congestion at Junction 9 of the M3, Mr Berresford explained that all the economical improvements to the junction had already taken place. Initial studies had demonstrated that further improvements to the scheme were likely to cost approximately £80m and because of this significant cost, any decision to improve the junction rested with the Regional Transport Board.

Chief Inspector Bayntum explained the Police's role in patrolling the local and primary road network in Hampshire. The Police had a duty to investigate any deaths on the road and this often resulted in a multi-agency operation, road closures and congestion in the surrounding network. He explained that during peak periods, each carriageway of the M3 through the Twyford cutting carried 5-6,000 vehicles an hour. As most of the surrounding road network often operated at 80-90% capacity, there was therefore little opportunity for the Police to divert traffic that did not result in congestion.

The Police's response was therefore largely limited to providing information to the local media. The media's handling of this information was often monitored by the Police's Major Incident Mobile Management Unit for accuracy and the Panel noted that further information was available to the public from Police phonelines and the internet.

The Panel also noted the role played by Police Community Support Officers who worked in partnership with the Police to help alleviate congestion.

In response to a question, Chief Inspector Bayntum explained that the Police had insufficient resources to switch off traffic lights and place officers at junctions to help the through-flow of congested traffic. However, Hampshire County Council was investigating changing the timing of traffic lights in the town centre during congested times. The Panel also noted that the Police were able to provide this kind of support at large organised events because of advance planning and the help of volunteers.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Verney addressed the Panel. In summary, he suggested that the Police should encourage use of the A303, rather than the A33, as a diversion; that it would be relatively easy to make improvements to Junction 9 with better use of the existing lanes and traffic lights, and that diversions should take account of the A272.

During debate, the Panel discussed the problems caused by satellite navigation systems diverting traffic through the centre of Winchester and noted that the City Council had erected a trial sign to warn drivers of heavy goods vehicles away from the centre.

Following debate, the Panel agreed to recommend that it should be investigated whether better signage and better use of existing lanes could improve Junction 9; that diversions should, where possible, minimise additional traffic through the centre of Winchester and use "secret symbols"; and that an origin and destination survey should be considered. The Panel agreed that these issues should be investigated by the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation and that the Portfolio Holder be asked to present a progress report to the 27 November 2007 meeting of the Panel. In noting its link with the Winchester Access Plan, the Panel also requested that the Portfolio Holder consider how to increase Member involvement at the District Council level.

At the conclusion of debate, the Chairman thanked Mr Berresford, Chief Inspector Bayntum, Mr Laycock, Mr Marklew, Mr Weeks and Mr Sawyer for their contribution to the discussion.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation be requested to investigate with the Highways Authority and Highways Agency the following measures to minimise traffic congestion in central Winchester, following incidents on the M3 motorway and A34, and present a progress report on the issues to the Panel at its meeting on 27 November 2007:

- i) improvements to Junction 9 M3 from better signage and use of existing lanes
- ii) agreed diversion routes avoiding the centre of Winchester, indicated by symbols
- iii) the possibility of carrying out an origin and destination survey

2. That the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation be asked to consider how to increase the involvement of City Council Members in the development of the Winchester Access Plan.

8. **PLANNING AND TRANSPORT PORTFOLIO – FOURTH QUARTER 2006/07**
PERFORMANCE MONITORING OUTTURN
 (Report EN37 refers)

During debate, the officers clarified a number of detailed questions from the Panel regarding the above Report. This included the long-term project to improve the planning service by increased joint working with other Hampshire local authorities, parking revenue, and sewerage treatment works.

Members congratulated the Planning Control Team for their improved performance. In response to a question, the Head of Planning Control explained that detailed reports of planning appeals were regularly considered by the Planning Development Control Committee.

During debate, Members raised concerns regarding the effectiveness of negotiations between planning officers and developers at the pre-application stage and considered that this may merit further investigation at a future meeting.

In response to Members' comments, the Head of Planning Control explained that the recent performance of the Enforcement Team had suffered as a consequence of long-term sickness within the Team. However, it was anticipated that performance should improve with the introduction of 1.5 FTE additional staff in the next few weeks.

The Panel raised concerns regarding the removal of rural bus services and requested that the Portfolio Holder consider this issue and, in particular, the short period of consultation offered by the County Council.

The Panel also requested that the Portfolio Holder consider how the Council could best seek Parish Councils' view of the planning service.

Members noted the underspend of the Environment Improvement Grant and requested the Portfolio Holder consider that any underspend at the end of the financial year should be carried forward into the following year.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel draws to the attention of the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport the following issues:

(i) the need to preserve bus services in rural areas and for the County Council to increase its consultation period on any proposed changes to bus services.

(ii) that the Portfolio Holder consider what measures could be taken to assess Parish Councils' views of the planning service.

(iii) that any underspend in 2006/07 with regard to the Environment Improvement Grant be carried forward to the current year.

9. **ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO – FOURTH QUARTER 2006/07 PERFORMANCE MONITORING OUTTURN**
(Report EN40 refers)

The Portfolio Holder for Environment introduced the Report and answered detailed questions. These included explanations of the Safe to Eat campaign and fly tipping.

The Panel also discussed the waste collection service and noted the new guidance from the Government, which had been largely misreported in the press. This guidance had requested all local authorities to take greater account of problems relating to kitchen waste. In addition, the Panel noted that a Report would be presented to a future meeting of Cabinet on the outcome of the Leader's Special Advisory Panel review of the alternate bin collection (ABC) scheme.

RESOLVED:

That the monitoring information contained in the Report be noted.

10. **PLANNING AND TRANSPORT PORTFOLIO AND ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO – PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2007/08**
(Report EN41 refers)

The Head of Performance and Scrutiny explained that the new style of the above Report streamlined information and highlighted key issues. The Panel agreed to accept the new style on a 12 month trial basis that would be reviewed, if necessary, at the Panel's 12 March 2008 meeting.

In discussing the information to be included in future reports, Members requested that the performance monitoring information should be simplified and accompanied with more comprehensive explanations. The Chairman welcomed any suggestions from Members for additional 'Report Cards' to be submitted by early September, in advance of the Report's preparation.

In addition to this, Panel Members would receive by email monthly background performance reports. The Chairman advised that if these contained an issue of concern, any Member could request that the matter be discussed in detail at the next meeting.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the above, comments, the Report be noted.

11. **DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME AND APPOINTMENT OF INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUPS**
(Report EN40 refers)

During its consideration of the Report, the Panel expressed an interest in visiting sites that were relevant to its area of work and accepted the Head of Environment's invitation to visit the Material Recycling Facilities plant.

With regard to the proposed discussion on Southampton Airport, the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health and Safety recommended that the Southampton Airport Joint Consultative Committee be involved.

Following debate, Members agreed that reports on progress on street scene issues and improving the local database for satellite navigation companies should be considered for future meetings.

RESOLVED:

1. That the proposed work programme, as set out in the Report, be agreed.

2. That, subject to the approval of Principal Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet, a Planning Enforcement Informal Scrutiny Group be established with a membership of Councillors Barratt, Higgins, Jackson and Lipscomb and that the Group commence its work as soon as possible (Note: with the Chairman's consent, the membership may change to include other Members of the Panel to replace those who were unable to attend this meeting).

3. That, subject to the approval of Principal Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet, the Major Outdoor Events Informal Scrutiny Group be established to commence work later in the year, after the Planning Enforcement Informal Scrutiny Group has reported its conclusions.

4. That the membership of the Major Outdoor Events Scrutiny Group be agreed as Councillors Anthony, Busher and Lipscomb (with a further Member to be appointed with the consent of the Chairman after the meeting) and that the Local Economy Scrutiny Panel be invited to nominate two of its Members to join the Group.

5. That Councillors Biggs and Busher be nominated to join Local Economy Scrutiny Panel's Rural Economy Informal Scrutiny Group.

12. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**
(Report PS284 refers)

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Work Programme, as set out on the reverse of the agenda, and as extracted from Report PS284, be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 10.00pm

Chairman