

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL**10 March 2009****Attendance:****Councillors:**

Lipscomb (Chairman) (P)

Bell (P)
Busher (P)
Clear (P)
Gemmell (P)
Howell (P)

Jackson (P)
Mather (P)
Maynard (P)
Stephens (P)
Thompson (P)
Wright (P)

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Pearson (Portfolio Holder for Environment)
Councillor Wood (Portfolio Holder for Planning and Access)

1. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Councillors Pearson and Wood declared personal and prejudicial interests due to their involvement as Cabinet Members in actions taken or proposed in the Reports outlined below.

However, the Panel asked the Cabinet Members, as Portfolio Holders, to remain in the meeting, under the provisions of Sections 21(13)(a) of the Local Government Act 2000, in order that they could provide additional information to the Panel and/or answer questions.

2. MINUTES**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the previous meeting held 11 November 2008 be approved and adopted.

3. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairman explained that the previous meeting of the Panel had been cancelled, due to a severe snow storm that week. Therefore, the business of that meeting (Reports EN77, EN78, EN75 and EN76, below) had been transferred to this meeting.

4. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no statements made or questions asked.

5. **PRESENTATION FROM THE ENERGY CENTRE:
OVERVIEW OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY, THE SCHEMES AVAILABLE TO
HELP AND THE COUNCIL'S OBLIGATIONS**
(Oral Report)

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Ms Laura James (Energy Advisor and Project Co-ordinator – The Environment Centre).

Ms James' gave the Panel a presentation which is available electronically [here](#).

Following her presentation, the Panel noted that:

- The materials now used in cavity wall insulations did not transfer damp and that the Environment Centre signposted customers to registered companies who guaranteed their insulation work for 25 years.
- Further information regarding the issues raised in Ms James' presentation was available from:
www.warmfront.co.uk
www.energysavingtrust.org.uk
www.push.gov.uk/4_safer_homes
www.environmentcentre.com

6. **STREET SCENE INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP ACTION PLAN UPDATE**
(Report EN77 refers)

At its previous meeting, held 11 November 2008, the Panel requested a further report to EN71, which updated Members on progress against the Street Scene Informal Scrutiny Group's Action Plan.

The Head of Environment explained that of the Group's recommendations have been incorporated into the emerging Citypride Campaign (a working title, Report WTF127 refers) and it was anticipated that this campaign would be rolled out beyond the town centre.

The Panel discussed the litter problems suffered at Abbey Gardens and the Cathedral Outer Close and the Council's efforts to tackle this through the provision of bins and notices. Following debate, Members agreed that the Police, PSCOs (Police Support Officers), ACSOs (Hampshire County Council Accredited Community Support Officers) and the Neighbourhood Wardens should be encouraged to use their enforcement powers and issue fines where appropriate to discourage litter dropping.

The Panel also considered the problem of illegal signage, including those advertising the location of new housing developments. The Head of Planning Management explained the regulations which, in certain circumstances,

permitted some of these signs. The Head of Environment offered to remove signs that had caused complaint where possible.

RESOLVED:

That the Report be noted.

7. **UPDATE ON OUT OF HOURS AND MAJOR OUTDOOR EVENTS INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUPS**
[\(Report EN78 refers\)](#)
8. **RESPONSE TO OUT OF HOURS INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP REVIEW'S RECOMMENDATIONS**
[\(Report EN84 refers\)](#)

The Panel noted that the above Reports had been requested by the Chairman to inform Members on the progress against the Out of Hours and Major Outdoor Events Informal Scrutiny Groups' recommendations.

Report EN78 set out the background to the Informal Scrutiny Groups' recommendations in the form of the subsequent Cabinet and Principal Scrutiny Committee minutes and these were noted by the Panel. The Head of Environment added that a further report on the continuing progress towards the Major Outdoor Events Informal Scrutiny Group's recommendations would be presented to the next meeting, to be held 20 July 2009.

In relation to Report EN84, the Head of Operations explained that there were no statutory obligations on the Council to provide out of hours tree preservation order, planning enforcement or environmental health services. With regard to Tree Preservation Orders, the Panel noted with regret that it was not possible to delegate powers (even through a bye-law) to Parish Councils to prevent important but unprotected trees being felled.

At the conclusion of debate, the Panel noted that, due to budgetary constraints, it had not been possible to implement all of the Informal Group's recommendations to further improve the Council's out of hours services. However, Members recommended that the Panel should review the feasibility of all the recommendations again in two years time, when the possibility of a more favourable economic climate may enable Cabinet to introduce the proposed changes.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel review the recommendations of the Out of Hours Informal Scrutiny Group again in two years time, when the possibility of a more favourable economic climate may enable Cabinet to introduce the proposed changes.

9. **PLANNING AND ACCESS PORTFOLIO – 2008/09 PERFORMANCE MONITORING QUARTER 3 UPDATE**
[\(Report EN75 refers\)](#)

In response to questions, Councillor Wood explained that, whilst there had been a reduction in the number of planning applications, this change would not automatically lead to a marked improvement in the Division's ability to determine applications more quickly. This was because some vacant posts had been frozen and because of the significant amount of work the Division was undertaking in relation to major developments.

The Panel also noted the reduced income from parking and, whilst this had been accounted for within the budget, the reduction was less marked than it had for other local authorities.

RESOLVED:

That the monitoring information in the Report be noted.

10. **ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO - 2008/09 PERFORMANCE MONITORING QUARTER 3 UPDATE**
[\(Report EN76 refers\)](#)

During debate, the Panel considered the Council's recycling rates. Councillor Pearson confirmed that the Council was still able to sell the recycled glass and paper it collected, but (due to its current low-price) was stockpiling metals. He explained that it was still not environmentally beneficial for the Council to collect food waste, but instead it was promoting home composting and campaigns to reduce the amount of food that was thrown away.

The Panel also commented on the unacceptably high amount of litter along the roadside of the A34 and A303. The Head of Environment stated that the situation could be improved if the Highways Agency were to adopt the responsibility from the Council to clear verges of litter, but in the meantime, he agreed to notify Members when the next scheduled maintenance was planned.

Members also noted, with regret, the increased incidences of fly-tipping and agreed that this should be brought to Cabinet's attention. Members discussed whether the increase of fly-tipping could be as a result of increased fees for commercial users of Household Waste Recycling Centres and noted that the Council was currently trying to identify trends and hotspots to tackle this problem. The Head of Environment also explained that the Council was about to discuss with the farming community ways to catch offenders, such as placing surveillance equipment in hotspots. In addition, Councillor Pearson agreed to express the Panel's concerns to the County Council's Portfolio Holder for Environment, Councillor Kendall, at the next meeting of Project Integra.

RESOLVED:

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

2. That Cabinet's attention be drawn the Panel's concerns regarding the increased incidences of fly-tipping.

11. **ENVIRONMENT DIVISION – BUSINESS PLAN 2009/10 ONWARDS**
(Report EN79 refers)

During consideration of the business plan, Members asked questions regarding the air quality action plan, contaminated land, noise regulations, biodiversity, and speed limits

The Panel also noted the importance of removing litter from rural roads and noted that complaints about unsheeted lorries (that causes litter to be blown onto the roads) were the responsibility of the Environment Agency.

Members raised concerns as to whether the targets set in the business plans were ambitious enough. However, the officers explained that the targets had to be realistic. For example, the level of satisfaction regarding the cleanliness of the streets, at 75%, was, in comparison with other local authorities, remarkably high.

The Panel agreed to recommend that the Business Plan be amended in respect of:

- ET2 (page 14) to include references to the Citypride Campaign and the positive measures the Council intend to take to improve the streetscene.
- That the units of measurement used should be made clearer within the Report (NI 191 refers, page 22).

In respect to future performance monitoring reports, the Panel requested further information on different types of fly tipping tackled by the Team and, if practical, for the litter hotspots to be marked geographically.

RESOLVED:

1. That, in the final drafting of the Environment Division Business Plan 2009/10, the Portfolio Holder for Environment have regard to the proposed amendments from the Panel regarding ET2 and NI 191 (as set out above).

2. That future performance monitoring reports include further information on of different types of waste tackled by the Environment Team and, if practical, for the litter hotspots to be marked geographically.

12. **PLANNING CONTROL DIVISION – BUSINESS PLAN 2009/10 ONWARDS**
(Report EN80 refers)

As in its consideration of Report EN79 above, the Panel commented that some of the targets in the Plan could be more ambitious. However, it was explained that concentrating solely on improving the speed at which planning applications were determined could have a detrimental effect on the quality of decisions made.

The Panel also asked questioned about the complaints procedure and planning fee income.

The Panel agreed to recommend that the Plan be amended in respect of:

- Page 4 – Target 1, the date be changed to March 2010, not 2020.
- Page 4 – Target 3, that the wording of the expected outcome be revisited
- Page 7 – PL2, that the 2008/09 estimate should read “96%”, not “9%”

The Panel did not identify any particular issues to be included in future performance monitoring reports.

RESOLVED:

That, in the final drafting of the Planning Control Division Business Plan 2009/10 the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Access have regard to the proposed amendments from the Panel, as set out above.

13. **BUILDING CONTROL DIVISION – BUSINESS PLAN 2009/10 ONWARDS**
(Report EN81 refers)

In response to questions, the Head of Building Control explained that the Council worked with other local authorities to promote the use of Council Building Control Divisions to large-scale, national developers. Furthermore, on a sub-regional basis, the Division were marketing themselves to social landlords.

The Panel also discussed the cost of implementing regulations related to reducing greenhouse emissions, the risk associated with dangerous structures and the performance matrix.

The Panel requested no amendments to the business plan or additional information in future performance monitoring reports.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel raises no comment on the Business Plan extract, attached as to Report EN81 as Appendix 2.

14. **ACCESS AND INFRASTRUCTURE DIVISION – BUSINESS PLAN 2009/10 ONWARDS**
[\(Report EN82 refers\)](#)

During discussion, Members commented on the improvements to the Friarsgate Car Park and acknowledged that notices had been served on Southern Water regarding their adoption of the Council's sewerage treatment plants.

In respect to Target 10 of Plan, the Head of Access and Infrastructure agreed to circulate to the Panel, outside of the meeting, information regarding the instances and location of road traffic accidents in the District. He also agreed to supply the Panel with background information regarding the processes related to the introduction of 20mph speed limits. He confirmed the Council's close links with the Road Safety Council.

The Panel also discussed the "Wheels to Work" proposal contained in Target 6 (page 14). It was explained that this was a scheme that would lend mopeds to young people in rural areas, to improve their access to employment facilities. Although Councillor Wood agreed to forward the safety regulations, the Panel agreed that their safety concerns regarding the scheme should be highlighted to Cabinet.

The Panel did not identify any particular issues to be included in future performance monitoring reports.

RESOLVED:

That in the final drafting of the Access and Infrastructure Division Business Plan 2009/10 onwards, the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Access have regard to the Panel's concerns regarding the safety implications of the Wheels to Work scheme.

15. **STRATEGIC PLANNING DIVISION – BUSINESS PLAN 2009/10 ONWARDS**
[\(Report EN83 refers\)](#)

The Head of Strategic Planning answered questions on the changes to the development plans system and obligations to produce a Local Development Framework which was compatible with the Government's housing targets.

The Panel requested that the Plan be amended in respect of:

- Page 6 – To include year headings be corrected.

The Panel did not identify any particular issues to be included in future performance monitoring reports.

RESOLVED:

1. That, in the final drafting of the Strategic Planning Division Business Plan 2009/10 onwards, the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Access have regard to the Panel's proposed corrections regarding the year headings on page 6.

16. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND MATTERS ARISING**
[\(Report PS354 refers\)](#)

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Work Programme, as set out on the reverse of the agenda, and as extracted from Report PS354, be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 10.00pm

Chairman