

CABINET

13 February 2013

FINAL REPORT OF THE FINDINGS OF THE INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP ON
ACCESS TO SERVICES IN THE MARKET TOWNS AND RURAL AREAS -
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CABINET

REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (HIGH QUALITY ENVIRONMENT)

Contact Officer: Rob Heathcock, 01962 848 476, rheathcock@winchester.gov.uk

RECENT REFERENCES:

[OS60 – FINDINGS OF THE INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP ON ACCESS TO
SERVICES IN THE MARKET TOWNS AND RURAL AREAS – 21 JANUARY 2013](#)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

At its meeting held on 21 January 2013, The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the recommendations of the Access to Services in the Market Towns and Rural Areas (Report OS60 refers). The Committee agreed to refer the recommendations to Cabinet for implementation and these are as set out below.

Report OS60 is attached as Appendix 2 to this report and Cabinet should refer to its content as background to its consideration of the recommendations of the Group.

Cabinet should also refer to the relevant extract of the minutes of the meeting of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21 January 2013 which is set out in Appendix 1 and supports the recommendations of the ISG.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Cabinet consider the recommendations of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and decide which of the following actions should be implemented:

- a) The City Council should reintroduce some form of annual printed publication for distribution to all households in the District including an investigation into

the potential for offsetting costs through advertising or partner contributions;

- b) If the annual printed publication is not adopted then the contact numbers card proposal should be implemented and distribution arranged through existing delivery opportunities;
- c) If funding cannot be found for (b) then alternative options for publicising contact numbers such as adverts in Parish magazines should be investigated;
- d) In order to support implementation of c) all Members should be surveyed in order to refresh the existing list of community publications available in their ward;
- e) Members should be advised of the information leaflets available and supplies provided upon request;
- f) An out of hours ansaphone facility should be included on the main City Council telephone number;
- g) The face to face support available for Hampshire Home Choice applicants should be reviewed particularly for those who do not have easy access to friends or relatives who can assist with the application process. This should include the possibility of commissioning the voluntary sector to provide such support;
- h) That Cabinet have very careful regard when allocating core grants to voluntary organisations to the contributions those organisations make towards assisting people at home (as they were undertaking work that the Council was unable to provide itself);
- i) The City Council should write to Hampshire County Council and request better promotion of the Village Agent scheme, particularly amongst District Councillors who should receive direct contact from the local volunteers;
- j) Further training should be offered to Members on the Hampshire County Council Trigger Tool and its use in assessing the home and fire safety needs of older persons;
- k) City Council services should be reminded to exploit every opportunity to provide face to face promotion and consultation particularly in the rural areas through village shows and fêtes;
- l) The City Council should investigate the use of community buildings for local decision making including planning consent applications which involve viewing sub committees.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

1. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND CHANGE PLANS (RELEVANCE TO):

Access to services is a priority area within the City Council's Community Strategy and forms part of the Effective and Efficient Change Plan actions.

2. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

The additional resource implications of the ISG recommendations were considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee (report OS60 refers) as follows

- a) Reintroduction of a Council newspaper/publication – the ISG is recommending an annual publication the cost of which will be approximately £15,000 including distribution.
- b) Development of the Access Number card initiative. The ISG recommend that this is not pursued as a separate initiative but incorporated within a council newspaper. If this is not done then production costs are estimated at £1200 with distribution costs dependant upon the method chosen.

3. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

3.1 There are no significant risk management issues associated with this report

4. EQUALITIES

4.1 It is important that access to services is delivered in a way that does not disadvantage anyone living in the rural parts of the district and the ISG considered this aspect as well as the role of equality impact assessments in designing service delivery.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Files held in the Democratic Services Division.

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 - Relevant extract of the minutes of the meeting of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21 January 2012

Appendix 2 - *is attached for Cabinet Members and Group Leaders only, with a copy available on-line via the following link:*

[OS60 – Findings of the Informal Scrutiny Group on Access to Services in Rural Areas and market Towns](#)

Extract of the minutes of the meeting of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21 January 2012

1. **FINDINGS OF THE INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP ON ACCESS TO SERVICES IN MARKET TOWNS AND RURAL AREAS**

(Report OS54 refers)

As Chairman of the Informal Scrutiny Group, Councillor Evans introduced the Report and thanked the officers who had supported the ISG in its work.

Councillor Evans emphasised that there was currently perhaps too much dependence on the internet for some access to services, which was particularly unsuitable for the elderly.

The Committee discussed the use of local printed circulars, such as parish magazines, to convey community information from the Council. The Assistant Director (High Quality Environment) advised that the Council would need to update its list of circulars so as to maximise this potential. Members also referred to the possibility of utilising the reverse of refuse collection timetables or the Council tax bill mailing to convey information, as these were sent to all households.

The Committee agreed that a further recommendation be added to those of the ISG to ensure that the progress of agreed actions be reviewed in 12 months time.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked the Members of the ISG and supporting officers for their work in undertaking the scrutiny review.

RESOLVED:

That The Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorse the following recommendations of the Informal Scrutiny Group as set out below and recommend them to Cabinet for implementation:

- i. The City Council should reintroduce some form of annual printed publication for distribution to all households in the District including an investigation into the potential for offsetting costs through advertising or partner contributions;
- ii. If the annual printed publication is not adopted then the contact numbers card proposal should be implemented and distribution arranged through existing delivery opportunities;
- iii. If funding cannot be found for (b) then alternative options for publicising contact numbers such as adverts in Parish magazines should be investigated;
- iv. In order to support implementation of c) all Members should be surveyed in order to refresh the existing list of community publications available in their ward;
- v. Members should be advised of the information leaflets available and supplies provided upon request;

- vi. An out of hours ansaphone facility should be included on the main City Council telephone number;
- vii. The face to face support available for Hampshire Home Choice applicants should be reviewed particularly for those who do not have easy access to friends or relatives who can assist with the application process. This should include the possibility of commissioning the voluntary sector to provide such support;
- viii. That Cabinet have very careful regard when allocating core grants to voluntary organisations to the contributions those organisations make towards assisting people at home (as they were undertaking work that the Council was unable to provide itself);
- ix. The City Council should write to Hampshire County Council and request better promotion of the Village Agent scheme, particularly amongst District Councillors who should receive direct contact from the local volunteers;
- x. Further training should be offered to Members on the Hampshire County Council Trigger Tool and its use in assessing the home and fire safety needs of older persons;
- xi. City Council services should be reminded to exploit every opportunity to provide face to face promotion and consultation particularly in the rural areas through village shows and fêtes;
- xii. The City Council should investigate the use of community buildings for local decision making including planning consent applications which involve viewing sub committees.
- xiii. That The Overview and Scrutiny Committee review progress against any agreed actions in 12 months time.