

**ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL**

**29 November 2005**

Attendance:

Councillors:

Pearson (Chairman) (P)

Busher  
De Peyer (P)  
Higgins (P)  
Jackson (P)  
Mather (P)

Pearce (P)  
Spender (P)  
Sutton (P)  
Verney (P)  
Wright (P)

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Beveridge (Portfolio Holder for Planning)  
Councillor Wagner (Portfolio Holder for Environmental Health)

Others in attendance who did not address the meeting:

Councillor Davies

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533. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Busher.

534. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions asked or statements made.

535. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meetings of the Panel, held on 19 July and 20 October 2005, be approved and adopted.

536. **CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS FOR THE CORPORATE STRATEGY AND BUDGETS 2006-09**

(Report EN12 refers)

The Panel considered the above Report in conjunction with CAB1149 (Roll Forward of Corporate Strategy and Revenue Budget 2006/09) which was considered by Cabinet on 16 November 2005.

The Chief Executive explained that the Panel were asked to comment on Cabinet's proposals for growth and savings items, within the context of the Council's need to identify savings of approximately £1million across the General Rate Fund Budget.

The Panel therefore considered each of the items from page 7 of CAB1149 Appendix 2. During this discussion, it was noted that Item 6 (General Reduction in Health Trading Accounts) fell within the remit of this Panel and not the Social Issues Scrutiny Panel as indicated in the Report. Following debate, this was agreed.

The Director of Communities also pointed out that the growth item, Item 12 (Outdoor Recreation Development Officer) should be considered not by this Panel, but by the Local Economy Scrutiny Panel, which was due to meet on 30 November 2005.

In response to questions on Item 9 (Roll-Out of Alternate Weekly Collection Pilot Project across the District), Councillor Wagner explained that it was unclear, at this stage, how much extra the project would cost until negotiations with the Contractor had been finalised. These negotiations centred on the extent of the additional resources (in terms of additional vehicles and manpower) that may be required. However, the Panel noted that the Pilot of the Scheme had been a great success and that a Health Impact Survey would be part of any future roll-out.

During the Panel's discussion on the proposed growth bid for dog waste collections, it was explained that this reflected an increase in the costs of the external contract. However, Members noted that the price of this contract had been frozen for the next three years and that, in the absence of any other contractor willing to take on this work, the price represented good value for money. The Panel also discussed the funding of this service in the unparished Winchester town area vis-à-vis the parished areas of the District.

In relation to Item 13, the Director explained that a change in Licensing legislation meant that the Council could no longer recover all of its costs (including those of the Environmental Health Team) related to the Homelands Festival. Following debate in which concerns were raised about the additional cost to the Council the event would now bring (approximately £35,000), Members asked Cabinet to investigate whether a charge could be made direct to the organiser for any services provided, to ensure the safety of the event. The Panel also noted that the decision to permit the event rested with the Licensing and Regulation Committee.

Members were concerned about the nil growth bid for new additional staff to help deliver the Planning Improvement Plan. In response to questions, Councillor Beveridge that without these additional staff, it would be more difficult to achieve targets (particularly in relation to major applications) and that this was likely to have an adverse effect on the amount of future Planning Delivery Grant received. He further explained that it might not be prudent to fund these extra posts through future Planning Delivery Grants, as the amounts were uncertain and varied year-by-year. The Director added that one of the proposed posts would have concentrated on improving the IT capability of the Team. At the conclusion of debate, the Panel agreed to highlight to Cabinet that they considered this saving to be a false economy.

The Panel also raised concerns with regard to savings item, Item 16 (Environmental Health Stand-By budget reduction). The Director had explained that whilst out-of-hours calls to Environmental Health would continue to be logged with Central Control, the proposed saving would mean that callers would no longer be guaranteed to receive a prompt call back and advice from an Environmental Health Officer. Members considered that, although there were only an average of 3-4 of these calls on a typical weekend, the withdrawal of the service would be to the detriment of residents and therefore requested that Cabinet reconsider this proposed saving. The Panel further requested that, should this saving be made, the impact it had on the service to the public be kept under review.

The Report contained a proposed saving by deleting the currently vacant 0.4 FTE within the Environmental Health Commercial Team. The Director explained that the reduction in establishment was likely to result in a 10% drop from the current 100% of food premises inspections completed within a year. Following discussion, the Panel agreed that Cabinet should also reconsider this proposed saving, as it was likely to adversely effect the Council's ability to meet targets set by the Food Standards Agency.

During discussion on the possible reduction of Planning Grants Councillor Beveridge confirmed that within the grants system, buildings at risk received the highest priority. In respect of savings Item 23, he explained that Cabinet sought the Panel's view on a possible reduction in the size of the Conservation Team. In response to questions, the Director of Development confirmed that if the Team was reduced, their workload would directly transfer to Planning Officers who may not possess the same expertise. Having regard to the number of properties affected by conservation issues within the District, Members concluded that if Cabinet wished to pursue this saving, the Panel should first consider a report that sets out the likely consequences of the saving and a description of the Conservation Team's current work.

The Panel also discussed air quality, and in response to a question, Councillor Wagner explained that he was aware of likely to be sometimes poor air quality at locations near the M3 motorway, but that the Council's ability to redress this was more limited than within the Air Quality Management Area in central Winchester.

At the conclusion of debate, whilst the Panel raised no significant comment on the proposed savings within Report CAB1149 other than those set out above, Members requested that future reports contain a greater level of information.

**RESOLVED:**

That, with regard to the proposed growth and savings items listed in Appendix 2 of Report CAB1149, Cabinet note the Panel's particular concerns (as set out in detail above) regarding:

- (a.) Growth Item 13 (Homelands)
- (b.) Growth Item 14 (Planning Improvement Plan)
- (c.) Savings Item 16 (Environmental Health Stand-By)
- (d.) Savings Item 19 (0.4 FTE from the Commercial Team)
- (e.) Savings Item 23 (Reduction of the size of the Conservation Team)

**537. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

In noting the Scrutiny Work Programme set out on the reverse of the agenda, the Panel agreed to meet informally to consider possible future work items.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 9.30 pm.

Chairman