ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

20 October 2005

Attendance:

Councillors:

Pearson   (Chairman) (P)

Bidgood (P)	Mather (P)
Busher (P)	Pearce
De Peyer (P)	Sutton (P)
Higgins (P)	Verney (P)
Jackson (P)	Wright (P)

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Beveridge (Portfolio Holder for Planning)

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457. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Pearce and Councillor Wagner (Portfolio Holder for Environmental Health).

458. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions asked or statements made.

459. **SECOND QUARTER 2005/06 PERFORMANCE MONITORING – PLANNING PORTFOLIO**
(Report EN9 refers)

Councillor Beveridge (Portfolio Holder for Planning) introduced the Report and highlighted the progress of the Planning Improvement Plan and explained that, even before the Plan had been implemented, there had been an improvement in the number of decisions determined within the statutory timescale.

During discussion, officers clarified a number of issues within the Report, including affordable housing, housing completion numbers and designing "safer" environments.

With regard to the Planning Enforcement Team, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that regardless of the amount of Planning Delivery Grant the Council may receive from Government, there was sufficient funding to sustain the recent staff increases within the Team. The Panel congratulated the Team on its improved performance, requested a monitoring report every quarter and discussed the future possibility of raising performance targets.

In response to Members' questions, the Portfolio Holder explained that the Planning Department's reliance on agency staff (and the associated additional costs) had declined.

It was also noted that the development of four Local Area Design statements had not progressed as anticipated, due to delays within the Council's appointed consultants. Following debate, the Director of Development agreed to ensure that the matter was pursued expeditiously.

Members discussed an overspend relating to costs awarded against the Council for planning appeals, but noted that these costs did not form part of the original budget, as they were difficult to predict. However it was agreed that the Portfolio Holder would discuss the issue with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources and the Director of Finance, to examine whether it was possible to predict trends and report back with any necessary recommendations.

In discussing E-access issues, the Panel noted that an upgrade to the computer programme would soon be able to blank out personal details on letters of representation, so that these letters could re-appear on the website.

With regard to P6 (to improve the street scene) it was agreed that this should in future be considered as part of the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Health's responsibility.

Members commented on the need for information on performance trends, but acknowledged that comparative performance statistics had not been possible within some aspects of the above Report, because of the organisational development changes made at the start of the year.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members congratulated the Strategic Team for its successful grant bid that won free energy efficiency consultancy work.

> RESOLVED:
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> That the Scrutiny Panel is satisfied that work is progressing as required so that targets agreed by Council and Cabinet, required to deliver the Council's strategic priorities, can be achieved by the deadlines set.

460. **SECOND QUARTER PERFORMANCE MONITORING - ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PORTFOLIO**
(Report EN10 refers)

During their consideration of the above Report, Members discussed the recent decision that Christmas wrapping paper (including paper wrapping) was not acceptable for recycling and the importance of a media campaign and public relations in the roll-out of the recycling programme.

In response to questions, the Director of Communities explained that a consultant's evaluation of the Air Quality Action Plan would be considered by a future meeting of the Informal Member/Officer Working Group.

The Director also clarified a number of issues arising from the Report, including street cleanliness and dog control. He also confirmed that despite the fact that the officer who undertook most of the health and safety inspections was part-time, high risk inspections were completed satisfactorily.

The Panel agreed that the performance monitoring statistics used with regard to water testing should be re-considered for future reports.

Following debate, the Panel noted that the variance at Line H of Appendix 2 (page 5), Recycling Pilot, was the result of an administrative error and would be corrected in the next report.

With regard to the emergency planning references within the Report at Appendix 6, Members noted that whilst the source of the disaster could vary (for example flooding or a terrorist attack) the nature of support sought from the Council was likely to be similar.   During its discussion, the Panel requested assurances that the Community Risk Register would be completed by November 2006 and further assurances on the links between the Emergency Planning Team and Parish Councils.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Panel is satisfied that work is progressing as required so that targets agreed by Council and Cabinet, required to deliver the Council's strategic priorities, can be achieved by the deadlines set.

461. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**
(Report PS195 refers)

The Chairman explained that in addition to the on-going Open Space Review, the Panel may wish to consider progress against the Council's agreed Environment Strategy and actions agreed following the Best Value Review looking at a High Quality Environment. He also indicated that he would like the Panel to keep an overview of progress being made against the Planning Improvement Plan. He indicated that he would bring further proposals on these issues to a future meeting of the Panel.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 9.40 pm.

Chairman