

**LOCAL ECONOMY SCRUTINY PANEL**

**30 November 2005**

Attendance:

Councillors:

Stallard (Chairman) (P)

Anthony (P)  
Bennetts (P)  
Berry (P)  
Cook (P)  
Godfrey (P)

Goodall (P)  
Love (P)  
Pines (P)  
Spender (P)  
Sutton (P)

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Evans (Portfolio Holder for Culture, Heritage and Sport)  
Councillor Knasel (Portfolio Holder for Economy and Transport)

Others in attendance who did not address the meeting:

Councillors Davies and Tait

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538. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions asked or statements made.

539. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Spender to his first meeting as a new Member of the Panel.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Evans reminded the Panel that the Community, Arts and Social Performance Improvement Committee had previously nominated a number of Members to the River Park Leisure Centre Users' Forum and that the next meeting was due to be held on 12 January 2006.

540. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meetings of the Panel held on 18 July and 2 November 2005 be approved and adopted.

541. **CONSULTATIONS ON PROPOSALS FOR CORPORATE STRATEGY AND BUDGETS 2006/09**  
(Report LE14 refers)

Councillor Pines declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest in respect of this item as the Chairman of the Winnall Rock School. He spoke and voted thereon.

During consideration of the above Report, the Panel also referred to CAB1149, Roll Forward of Corporate Strategy and Revenue Budget 2006/09 (Update) which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 16 November 2005.

With regard to the budget figures set out in the Appendix to LE14, one Member queried whether it would be possible to differentiate between revenue from external sources and revenue generated from internal charges between Council Directorates. The Director of Development noted this point and responded to further questioning regarding the apportioning of central charges between Departments.

With regard to CAB1149, Members noted that item 12, which detailed a growth proposal for an Outdoor Recreation Officer, also fell within the remit of the Panel. One Member queried whether the whole cost of this post could be met from the Open Space Fund. The Director of Development explained that the proportion of funding from the Open Space Fund must match the proportion of time the officer would spend on Open Space work. Based on the experience gained from an officer being employed temporarily in this role, it was estimated that only 50 per cent of their time would be employed for Open Space purposes. The Director also clarified that the proposal was for the post to assist with Open Space Funding distribution in relation to the Winchester Town area only. One Member suggested that the possibility of employing an Officer solely to work on Open Space projects (and therefore able to be resourced entirely by Open Space funding) be investigated. The £15,000 growth proposal could be used to establish a second part-time post working on the other functions currently undertaken. The Panel noted that an Open Spaces Informal Scrutiny Group had been established, which would also consider such issues.

Following further discussion, the Panel agreed that the proposal for an additional post to assist in distribution of Open Space funding in the Town area be supported in principle. In addition, the Director be requested to investigate whether the same amount of resources could be spent in an alternative way to enable additional work to be carried out at no extra cost to the Council.

Councillor Knasel responded to questions regarding the proposal to increase car park fees and advised that more detail would be provided in a report to Cabinet on 14 December 2005. He summarised that the proposal was to increase charges primarily in long-stay car parks and also the Park and Ride sites as its charges had not increased since 1998. Overall the proposal was to increase some parking charges by between 15 and 20 per cent.

During discussion, concerns raised by the Panel included the level of management overheads in the Parking Section, and the increased requirement for Parking Attendants to be available to deal with difficulties, particularly with the 'Pay on Foot' machines. The Director explained that there were not any fundamental difficulties with the machine equipment, but there were working parts which required servicing or replacement on a regular basis. The Panel requested that comparative information be provided on the level of management overheads in other local authorities, and also the costs specifically apportioned to management of the 'Pay on Foot' machines.

The Director of Communities responded to questions about the operation of Meadowside Leisure Centre and confirmed that the membership of its gym was now at capacity and other bookings were also on the increase. He confirmed that he considered the increased income projection of £25,000 for 2006/07 to be reasonable. Some Members queried whether any analysis had been undertaken into potential savings to the Council if the management of the Centre was transferred to the private sector. The Director explained that this issue was complicated by the County Council possibly seeking to locate a new primary school on this site and further details about this proposal would not be known until early 2006. The Panel agreed that work on considering alternative options for the management of the Centre should be included as a possible item in the Work Programme for later in 2006.

With regard to the potential savings regarding Engineering detailed at Item 28 (page 10 of CAB1149), the Director of Development explained that the vacancy of the Head of Engineering Services post had resulted in an opportunity to consider the reorganisation of the department in order to reduce the number of senior management posts. However, it was not possible to give further details at this stage because of the personnel implications involved. In response to questions, the Director confirmed that the proposed savings also involved reducing the work on sustainable transport initiatives and this did conflict with the stated aims in the Directorate's Business Plan. However, it was considered that the primary responsibility for this area was with the County Council and because of the requirement to reduce the budget deficit, this was one of the difficult choices to be made.

Councillor Evans responded to questions regarding the proposed savings detailed at Item 30 relating to an overall reduction in costs of cultural services. She advised that the proposed savings could be achieved by different working methods (for example, issuing some publications electronically rather than in hard copy), and some changes in staff working which could include a reduction in staffing levels. However, it was not possible to give further details at this stage because of the personnel implications involved.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the Panel notes the proposed General Rate Fund budget (prepared in line with the Council's Corporate Strategy) and Cabinet's proposals for savings on Local Economy Issues covered by the Panel.

2. That Cabinet's attention be drawn to the following areas where further action is required, summarised below (and outlined in more detail in the preamble above):

- Further investigation of the best method of funding for the proposed Outdoor Recreation Officer in relation to the Open Space Fund;
- Further information on the management overheads for the Parking Section compared with other local authorities, and the costs of managing the 'Pay on Foot' machines;
- Consideration of alternative options for the management of the Meadowside Leisure Centre should be included as a possible item in the Work Programme for later in 2006.

542. **REVIEW OF WINCHESTER'S CULTURAL STRATEGY 2003-2007**  
(Report LE10 refers)

The Director of Development advised that the Review had highlighted that most of the Cultural Strategy had been implemented and that any outstanding elements had been absorbed into other Strategies.

One Member suggested that although a significant amount of work had been undertaken in relation to play areas, it was also necessary for a number of bye-laws to be reviewed. For example, the bye-laws relating to fines for people who allow their dogs to foul in public areas. The Director noted this point and agreed to discuss further with the City Secretary & Solicitor and Director of Communities.

One Member highlighted the success of the recent archaeology dig at Olivers Battery and queried whether it was planned to repeat this event elsewhere in the District. The Director confirmed that plans were already beginning for another dig.

Following discussion, the Panel expressed its congratulations to the Officers involved in the preparation of the review, and in particular the Head of Cultural Services.

RESOLVED:

1. That based on the evidence provided in the Report, the Panel considers that:

- a) work is progressing well against the Strategic Action Plan;
- b) leisure and cultural services are being provided and developed in the Winchester District in line with the principles and target outcomes of the Cultural Strategy.

2. That the Director of Development undertake further investigation about the requirement for a review of Winchester's bye-laws, particularly those relating to play areas.

543. **PROGRESS THROUGH PARTNERSHIP – THE ROLE OF WINCHESTER CITY CENTRE PARTNERSHIP AND THE OPPORTUNITY OFFERED BY BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS (BIDs)**  
(Report LE11 refers)

The City Centre Manager, Graham Love, gave a presentation on the background to Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and the opportunities offered by the initiative for Winchester. He also requested that the following two additional recommendations be added to the Report:

- That the Panel act as a 'critical friend' in examining the proposal for BIDs;
- That the Panel support the proposal for the introduction of BIDs in Winchester.

In summary, the BIDs scheme proposed that all businesses within the area of the BID contributed one per cent of their rateable value to a central fund, which was then controlled by the businesses themselves. To be introduced, a referendum must be carried out and at least 50 per cent of the votes cast must be in favour of the scheme, and this positive vote must represent at least 50 per cent of the rateable value. The BID would last for a five year period. Mr Love advised that it was

anticipated it would take about eighteen months preparation before a referendum could be held.

The Chairman thanked Mr Love for an interesting and informative presentation.

Councillor Knasel confirmed that the BID process was one of the Council's objectives and was supported by the Chamber of Commerce, the City Centre Partnership and a growing number of retailers. He emphasised that one of the key elements to the success of the initiative was the content of the Memorandum of Understanding, which would set out which services were currently and would continue to be provided by the Council. A key element was to reassure businesses that all additional funds raised would be used to provide extra benefits and not replace the taxes already paid.

In response to questions, the Director confirmed that there would not be any costs to the Council in preparation of the BID, apart from officer time and this was included within the budget. The Director also advised that Thornfields had indicated that they would be supportive of the BID and the Silver Hill development could make other businesses more enthusiastic to take the opportunity to improve their own environment.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the contents of the Report and the presentation by the City Centre Manager be noted.

2. That the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Transport be advised that the Panel considers that the BIDs initiative should be supported in principle.

544. **WORKPLACE AND SCHOOL TRAVEL PLANS**  
(Report LE13 refers)

A number of Members expressed concern about the slow progress being made with workplace travel plans, although it was noted the County Council were proposing to focus on the two specific areas of Whiteley and Romsey Road, Winchester.

During discussion about Whiteley, Councillor Knasel reminded Members of the complicated history of development in this area and the difficulties experienced. He also emphasised that the County Council was primarily responsible for addressing the various access problems in and out of Whiteley, for vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians. The Chairman mentioned that County Councillor Knight (Executive Member for Environment South Hampshire and Resources Management, which included transport) had been invited to the January 2006 meeting of the Panel.

With regard to Romsey Road, Winchester, the Director advised that the County Council were considering a number of initiatives in this area, including a new Park and Ride site to the south of the City.

In response to a question regarding School Travel Plans, the Director confirmed that, as with all travel plans, it was important for the school or other organisation to have someone willing to act as a "Champion" to take the Plan forward.

RESOLVED:

1. That the contents of the Report be noted.
2. That Cabinet be advised of the Panel's disappointment with the lack of progress with Work Travel Plans.

545. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

The Panel discussed the contents of the revised Work Programme as set out on the reverse of the agenda.

With regard to the proposed scrutiny of the Arts Strategy, the Chairman requested that this be included in the programme for the January 2006 meeting. As the Strategy had not yet been approved by Cabinet it was noted that Cabinet should be requested to allow consideration by the Panel at its meeting on 26 January 2006.

With regard to Fair Trade, the Chief Executive reported that work was still progressing through a community group towards Winchester becoming a Fair Trade City. It was possible this status could be achieved by Spring 2006. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Council had nominated Councillor Beveridge as a representative on this Group but neither the Councillor nor the two officer representatives had been invited to attend the Group's meetings. The Panel requested that a report on this issue be submitted to its March 2006 meeting.

RESOLVED:

1. That the contents of the Scrutiny Work Programme relating to the work of this Panel be noted, subject to the addition of Fair Trade at the 15 March 2006 meeting.
2. That Cabinet be requested to allow scrutiny of the Arts Strategy at the 26 January 2006 meeting of the Panel.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 9.15pm

Chairman