

RESOURCES SCRUTINY PANEL

21 March 2006

Attendance:

Councillors:

Hollingbery (Chairman) (P)

Clohosey (P)
Cooper
Davies (P)
Higgins (P)
Hoare

Jeffs (P)
Mitchell (P)
Pearce (P)
Spender (P)
Verney (P)

Deputy Members:

Councillor Wright (Standing Deputy for Councillor Cooper)

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Learney (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources)
Councillor Cook (Chairman of Personnel Committee)

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Cooper.

2. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Panel held on 31 January 2006 be approved and adopted.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions asked or statements made.

4. **HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTORATE BUSINESS PLANS 2006/07**
(Report RE20 refers)

The Chairman of Personnel Committee explained that the Human Resources Directorate Business Plan was brought before the Scrutiny Panel as there had not been a recent Personnel Committee meeting. He explained that the Human Resources Directorate had suffered from staffing shortages which had delayed the progress of many projects. However, progress was now being made with the implementation of the joint Human Resources/Payroll IT

system. The initiative for a joint recruitment contract with the County Council and other authorities was also underway.

In response to a Member's question, the Director of Human Resources reported that the Project Management System was being gradually rolled out across the organisation, that staff training had already taken place and that it would help to improve efficiency. She added that the way in which flexible working was implemented was also being reviewed, so that the Council would be an employer of choice for staff and, as a result, would improve the level of customer service offered. She reported that the flexible working project included home working, hot desking and mobile working, but that the scheme had only been running for a few months. The Director of Human Resources continued that that this would be rolled out across the organisation and that it would be assessed to see how the scheme could be used to reduce the need for individual desk space. She added that flexible working also offered the potential for reducing staff turnover, but that a certain level of turnover was healthy for the organisation.

During discussion, the Director of Human Resources confirmed that the only union recognised by the Council was UNISON and that she was the lead officer on negotiations with the union, although she also received input from the Chief Executive and Portfolio Holders. The Panel requested that Members received information relating to the Council's stance on the industrial action over pension rights and that guidelines for answering queries on the current dispute were made available on the intranet and through the Members Briefing Note. Councillor Learney stressed, however, that Winchester City Council was supporting the national negotiating position through the LGA.

The Director of Human Resources reported that the implementation of the new HR/Payroll system, Selima, was on target and that the majority of staff had received training on how to use the product. She explained the process of the self-service aspect of the system and how this would reduce the need for paper forms. Separate authorisation was still required from managers. She added that it would also aid managers in monitoring the levels of staff absence.

Responding to a question, the Director of Human Resources confirmed that there had been an increase in long term sick leave for staff, but that this was being monitored by Human Resources and that a new sickness/absence monitoring procedure would shortly be implemented. She added that referrals to Occupational Health should help to reduce the numbers of long term sickness.

Following discussion, it was noted that some targets from the current year had been delayed due to staffing shortages. However, it was not clear from the Business Plan that this had occurred and how it was being addressed.

RESOLVED:

That the Human Resources Directorate 2006/07 Business Plan be supported.

5. **ESTATES DIVISION BUSINESS PLAN 2006/07**
(Report RE22 refers)

The Chief Estates Officer reported that proposals for the replacement of the Council Offices were being formulated based upon the Colebrook Street site. He explained that the flexible working scheme could have some impact on the size of the building if it was proved there was not a need for as many dedicated work spaces. He added that the design of the building would also need to be as flexible as possible.

During discussion of the Business Plan, the issue of the Hockley Viaduct was raised by Members. The Chief Estates Officer confirmed that it was owned by the City Council and that, although several alternatives for the site had been considered, none were suitable. He added that demolition of the Viaduct had been considered, but that this would prove too expensive. He continued that attempts had also been made to get the viaduct listed but that this had proved unsuccessful. The Chief Estates Officer confirmed that, at the current time, the City Council had a duty to maintain the structure and ensure its safety.

A Member asked whether it would be sensible to undertake a review of the Council's landholdings. In particular should small sites, often producing a low retail income, be disposed of? The Chief Estates Officer indicated that such sites usually had a community benefit and were being held for this reason. A comprehensive review would require significant staff time which was not currently available given the major projects for Silver Hill and the City Offices.

At the request of the Chairman, the Chief Estates Officer identified his top three priorities from the Business Plan. These were gaining planning consent for the Silver Hill project, the appointment of a Project Manager for the City Offices scheme and the provision of a business centre at Winnall.

RESOLVED:

That the Estates Division Business Plan 2006/07 be supported and that the following point be made:

- (i) That a recommendation be made to Cabinet that the options for the future management of the Hockley Viaduct be reconsidered.

6. **FINANCE DIRECTORATE BUSINESS PLANS 2006/07**
(Report RE18 refers)

At the request of the Chairman, the Director of Finance identified her three main priorities from the Business Plan as concentrating on the Efficiency Programme, the expansion of the Customer Service Centre and delivering the E-Government Programme, in particular with the Document Management System and flexible working.

The Panel considered whether it was the appropriate body to undertake the scrutiny role in relation to the Council achieving its Gershon efficiency targets. The Director of Finance indicated that her future performance reports could include this information. The Panel was willing to undertake this task provided that Principal Scrutiny Committee did not wish to undertake the role itself.

During discussion, the Head of Revenues confirmed that the Benefits Team had been involved in the joint surgeries with Housing for improved access in rural areas. She confirmed that more staff would be out in the community attending the parish pilots. There were plans to extend the surgeries and pilots where possible, depending on resources.

At the request of the Chairman, the Head of Revenues identified her top three priorities from the Business Plan as supporting the production of the Council's Business Continuity Plan, the inclusion of Revenues services into the Customer Service Centre and implementing the project to replace the HR/Payroll system.

In response to a Member's question, the Head of IT stated that the Document Management System had not been rolled out across the organisation, as there had been other projects to complete and it was not suitable for the wider future needs of the organisation. However the possibility of joint procurement was being investigated with Fareham Borough Council. She added that the implementation process of the new system would take up to four years to be fully functional, as it meant changing the way in which staff work.

During discussions, Members queried the costs involved with implementing the E-Government projects. The Director of Finance confirmed that many projects were driven by Government requirements and that both Cabinet and Council had approved the E-Government programme. The Head of IT added that although there had been some delays on IT projects over the last eighteen months due to staffing shortages, all projects were now on target and would be achieved. These would then lead to savings within departments and these savings would be monitored. She also commented that there would be a small strategic risk involved with the implementation of these projects. The Director of Finance also indicated that a business case for each project would still have to be prepared before a decision was made to proceed.

At the request of the Chairman, the Head of IT identified her top three priorities from the business plan to roll out the new HR/Payroll system across the organisation, keep meeting targets for the EDRMS project and to ensure that work continued on developing the City Council's website into a transactional site.

The Customer Service Manager reported that the Customer Service Centre was performing well against national figures and that this was due to recruiting experienced members of staff. He added, however, that some staff had moved internally to other departments within the Council. At the request of the Chairman, the Customer Service Manager outlined his priorities for the coming year as increasing customer satisfaction, seeing through the implementation of Phase 2 of the Customer Service Centre and completing a review of Office Support.

RESOLVED:

That the Finance Directorate Business Plan, 2006/07 be supported and the following points made:

- (i) That Cabinet be advised to consider the strategic risks involved in developing the EDRMS project including the

consequential impact of its effect upon the delivery of services during the implementation period

(ii) That Principal Scrutiny Committee be asked to determine which was the appropriate body for undertaking the scrutiny role in monitoring the Council's performance on the delivery of the Gershon efficiency targets and that it be advised that the Resources Scrutiny Panel was willing to undertake the role.

7. **CITY SECRETARY AND SOLICITOR'S DIRECTORATE BUSINESS PLANS 2006/07**

(Report RE19 refers)

The City Secretary and Solicitor confirmed that although future volume of applications under the Gambling Act was not likely to be substantial, this did not reduce the significant amount of work that the Licensing Section would have to do to ensure that systems were in place. The Council had not made any representations for the District to be considered as a location for a major casino.

At the request of the Chairman, the City Secretary and Solicitor identified the three top priorities for each senior manager within the Directorate as follows:

City Secretary and Solicitor:

- (i) Taking overall responsibility for the legal and administrative aspects of the Council's Corporate Governance arrangements.
- (ii) Ensuring that the Monitoring Officer role is undertaken effectively.
- (iii) Taking overall responsibility for the proper conduct of elections and the changes resulting from the new Electoral Regulations.

Assistant City Secretary (Administration):

- (i) Ensuring the proper conduct of elections and implementing the changes resulting from the new Electoral Regulations.
- (ii) Introduction of changes to the Model Code of Conduct for District and parishes.
- (iii) Abbey House Capital Maintenance Scheme.

Assistant City Secretary and Solicitor (Legal):

- (i) Complete first phase of Land Charges computerisation project.
- (ii) Key internal aspects of the Silver Hill project.
- (iii) Adopt Gambling Policy under new licensing provisions and assess staffing levels.

RESOLVED:

That the City Secretary and Solicitor's Directorate 2006/07 Business Plans be supported.

8. **PROPOSED REVIEW OF BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION**

(Report RE21 refers)

The Chairman reported that the Informal Scrutiny Group had met to discuss issues surrounding the proposed review.

RESOLVED:

That Principal Scrutiny and/or Cabinet be asked to agree to this Panel carrying out a review of benefits on the lines set out in the above report.

9. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**
(Report PS223 refers)

The Panel discussed the general approach to Business Plans for 2006/07 and noted that the format had developed since the review which had been undertaken by Principal Scrutiny Committee in 2004/05. Members noted that some changes could be of benefit to Managers and their staff. However, it was considered that the current format was not sufficiently concise, in Plain English, or in an easily accessible style, to assist Members to focus on key issues. It was suggested that it would be beneficial for Principal Scrutiny Committee to undertake a post implementation review.

The Chairman referred to the three Key Issues he had asked each manager to identify when the Panel discussed their Business Plan. He asked that the future Performance Monitoring Reports should focus on these issue.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Scrutiny Work Programme, as set out in Report PS223 be noted.

2. That Principal Scrutiny Committee be advised of the Panel's concern with the current format of the Business Plans and that it is recommended to Principal Scrutiny Committee that a post implementation review be carried out into how the Business Plans were working, having regard to the guidelines that were originally established.

3. That a recommendation be made to Principal Scrutiny Committee that they be asked to consider that Business Plans include the top quartile performance indicator targets for comparison, where relevant and available.

10. **VOTE OF THANKS**

The Panel thanked the Chairman for his guidance and the officers for their hard work and support during the past Municipal Year.

The Chairman reciprocated appropriately.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 9.30pm

Chairman

