

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

27 November 2006

Attendance:

Councillors:

Saunders (Chairman) (P)

Beveridge (P)
Busher (P)
Godfrey (P)
Higgins (P)
Howell
Jackson (P)

Mather (P)
Rees (P)
Weston (P)
Wagner
Wright (P)

Deputy Members

Councillor Bennetts (Standing Deputy for Councillor Wagner)

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Beckett (The Leader and Portfolio Holder for Economy and Tourism)
Councillor Allgood (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources)
Councillor Pearson (Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health and Safety)

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Howells, his Standing Deputy Councillor Verney, and Councillor Wagner.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Panel, expressed her dissatisfaction that for the third meeting in succession, the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport had been unable to attend the meeting. However it was acknowledged that the new Portfolio Holder had been unable to attend this meeting due to a commitment made prior to his appointment to his current post.

2. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held 17 October 2006 be approved and adopted.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Mr Perry addressed the Panel on issues relating to refuse collection. In summary, Mr Perry criticised the monitoring of the contract as, prior to his action and lobbying of the media, refuse vehicles had been collecting waste from residential properties before the hours set out in the contract. He suggested that the terms of the contract

were overly optimistic as it provided the contractors too short a time to satisfactorily complete the job.

Mrs Perry addressed the Panel on similar issues and additionally commented that the contractors were intermingling waste from the wheelie bin of one property with that of another, which often made previously clean bins dirty.

In response, the Director of Communities thanked Mr and Mrs Perry for their comments and confirmed that the collection of waste before the hours permitted in the contract had ceased. He also explained that it had been a long established practice to mix waste materials from one partly empty bin to another, but that this should not occur with recyclable waste. He also stated that the depot contract was regularly and thoroughly scrutinised by both Principal Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet, but that comments from the public were always gratefully received and investigated.

4. **DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS 2007**
(Report EN27 refers)

Councillor Busher declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest in respect of the proposed budget for the Animal Welfare Act, as she was the owner of a livestock business. Councillor Busher spoke and voted thereon.

Councillor Allgood introduced the Report and explained the financial constraints the Council faced in the preparation of the 2006/07 Budget. With this in mind, he asked the Panel to consider the priorities set out in the Appendix of the Report and requested that they recommend any further savings.

During debate, the Panel raised a number of questions relating to information in the Report. In response to these, the Director of Development explained that the expenditure on the Tower Street car park was in addition to City Council's obligations to the planned refurbishment of the building and related to items such as lighting.

In response to other questions, the Panel noted that it was often not possible to increase the fees received by the Council for licensing major events, such as the Motocross Grand Prix. The Director also explained that increasing the fee charged for the return of stray dogs would deter some owners from collecting their dogs, thus rendering the Council liable for destruction or re-housing costs. The Panel also noted the Director's detailed explanations of the proposed budgets for design guidance (E11) the Animal Welfare Act (E5).

The Panel noted the increased expenditure on concessionary travel and the Director of Development explained that this was due to the large increase in the number of people using the scheme, following changes by the Government to the way it was operated. Further changes to the scheme were anticipated in 2008. A Member suggested that opportunities for reducing this expenditure be investigated, including restricting the usability of the scheme to travel within the District only. The Director explained that this option had been taken by Fareham Borough Council and that the scheme was monitored on a countywide basis by consultants.

Councillor Beckett explained that the capital growth bid (E32) for the provision of transport in rural areas would be aimed at those areas where these services did not currently exist. Following discussion, the Panel supported this growth bid, subject to the availability of sufficient funds.

In response to questions, the Director of Communities clarified that despite the possible deletion of part of the Recycling Officer post through retirement, efforts would be made to try and continue publicity work with schools and local community groups. In noting their role and relationship with the County Council, the Panel agreed with the proposed growth bid (E13) to retain two Advisor posts beyond the completion of the ABC roll-out, to help maximise the Council's potential to recycle waste. The Panel also agreed that the scope for increasing the use of publications to change behaviour to waste management should be considered.

In relation to E12, Councillor Beckett confirmed that a greater amount would be drawn from the Winchester Town Account to fund the maintenance and repair of playground equipment in the town. He added that this would be considered in further detail by a future meeting of the Winchester Town Forum.

The Panel highlighted the importance of replacing trees, especially in high profile areas, and Councillor Beckett agreed to re-consider this aspect of the Tree Inspections' budget.

Similarly, Councillor Beckett noted the Panel's concerns regarding the low priority afforded to the capital growth bid for the refurbishment of the Abbey Gardens public toilets. Members considered that this facility was important, as it was often the first impression of Winchester for tourists arriving by coach.

Members discussed the proposed Park and Ride budget and noted that there was a priority growth bid to cover contract inflation over and above RPI. The Panel recommended that Cabinet consider increasing the charges for Park and Ride to offset this cost, provided this was possible without affecting the commercial interests of Winchester town centre. Several Members of the Panel agreed that as the Park and Ride car parks were operating at near full capacity they may therefore be able to bear an increased charge and that they were being used as additional car parking for the railway station. The possibility of introducing differential charges for larger engine capacity cars or for those not working in Winchester was also discussed. Members' comments were noted by Councillor Beckett who confirmed that a future meeting of Cabinet would be re-considering these charges.

At the conclusion of debate, the Panel agreed to accept the order of priorities as set out in the Report, subject to the priority for possible additional resources for the street scene being reconsidered as part of the next year's budget considerations.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That Cabinet be recommended that the relative priorities for the budget as set out in the Report be agreed, subject the comments above.**
- 2. That Cabinet be recommended to consider offsetting the proposed additional costs for Park and Ride through increased charges.**
- 3. That Cabinet be informed that the Panel was unable to identify any further savings.**

5. **AUDIT COMMISSION INSPECTION – SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT**
(CAB1327 refers)

Councillor Pearson introduced the Report and explained that it had been put to the Panel for Members to scrutinise Cabinet's response to the Audit Commission's Inspection.

During debate, Members raised concerns to the wording in Recommendation 5: "...and have the courage to weather any opposition during the district-wide roll-out." The Director of Communities explained that these were the recommendations and wording of the Audit Commission, not the Council. Their comments reflected the time taken by the City Council to assess options for increasing recycling, taking account of the experience of other local authorities that had reversed their implementation of the alternative bin collection (ABC) system following public concerns. Councillor Pearson added that alternatives of the ABC system had significant disadvantages.

In response to a Member's suggestion, the Panel agreed to request a report at a future meeting to justify the Council's action to seek to reduce "greenhouse" gas emissions in response to climate change. The Member referred the Panel to the recent MET Office Report which was available at: http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/climate/uk/about/UK_climate_trends.pdf, which did not identify "greenhouse" gases as a cause of climate change and it was agreed that the Report should address this point.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Panel is satisfied with Cabinet's response to the Audit Commission Inspection – Sustainable Environment.
2. That officers prepare a report to a future meeting to justify the Council's action to seek to reduce "greenhouse" gas emissions in response to climate change.

6. **STREET SCENE INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP**
(Oral Report)

The Director of Communities explained that the Group had met on four occasions and was expected to report its recommendations to the Panel on 12 March 2007.

RESOLVED:

That the Report be noted.

7. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**
(Report PS259 refers)

The Chief Executive explained that arrangements were currently being made for a future meeting of the Panel to receive a presentation from the Hampshire and Wildlife Trust and a Member agreed to arrange presentations from the National Farmers' Union and the Council for the Protection of Rural England.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Work Programme, as set out on the reverse of the agenda, and as extracted from Report PS259, be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 9.25pm

Chairman