

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL**24 January 2007****Attendance:**

Councillors:

Saunders (Chairman) (P)

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

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

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Pearson (Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health and Safety)
Councillor Wood (Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport)
Councillor Pines

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Rees and his Standing Deputy, Councillor de Peyer.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 17 October and 27 November 2006 be approved and adopted.

3. PRESENTATION BY THE SHABBY WINCHESTER GROUP

Mr Grant of the Shabby Winchester Group gave the Panel a presentation to illustrate the poor condition and maintenance of areas of central Winchester.

In summary, he was concerned about the area around the Cathedral which was visited most by tourists. He suggested that this area suffered from poor repairs to pavements, clutter from poorly maintained signs and street markings, street lights that required cleaning and repair, the state of rubbish bins, weeding and graffiti. He highlighted the poor state of The Pentice in the High Street and suggested that the Council should encourage repair by its commercial owners. Mr Grant also illustrated the use that heavy good vehicles were making of the narrow roads around the Cathedral area as a rat run and pointed out that the Council used refuse freighters which were too large for the narrow streets.

However, in acknowledging the excellent maintenance of Abbey Gardens, Mr Grant suggested that there was an opportunity for Winchester to improve its streetscene

and he illustrated Chester and (to a lesser extent) Guildford as examples of good practice. He concluded that maintenance of public areas was important to the town's tourism and, with regard to the condition to the pavements, important to prevent serious injury.

The Chairman thanked Mr Grant for his presentation and in response to the points raised, the Panel noted the work of the Streetscene Informal Scrutiny Group (see below) and that most of the action points for improvement were the responsibility of the County Council. The Director of Communities suggested that additional future funding for these maintenance issues might be available from the emerging Business Improvement District initiative. The Panel also noted that plans to reduce the number of large lorries in the centre of Winchester had been included in the Council's Air Quality Action Plan.

At the conclusion of debate, the Panel acknowledged the importance of the issues raised by Mr Grant and agreed that it was an area that it should scrutinise further by inviting the County Council's Executive Member for Environment together with representatives of the tourism industry to a future meeting. The Panel also recommended that Mr Grant should repeat his presentation directly to a meeting of the County Council's Hampshire Action Team for this area.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel recognise the concerns raised by the Shabby Winchester Group and request that the matter be further scrutinised at a future meeting to involve the County Council's Executive Member for Environment, together with representatives of the tourist industry.

4. **STREETSCENE INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP REVIEW**
(Report EN31 refers)

The above item had not been notified for inclusion on the agenda within the statutory deadline. The Chairman agreed to accept the item onto the agenda as a matter requiring urgent consideration so that it could be considered along with the Shabby Winchester presentation above.

The Director of Communities explained that the Report set out the conclusions and recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel's investigations into street scene issues.

Following discussion, the Panel made a number of amendments to the recommendations set out in the Report and agreed to delegate authority to the Director of Communities, in consultation with the Chairman, to present these in a further report to a future meeting of Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

1. That the recommendations be accepted and referred directly to Cabinet, subject to the Director of Communities in consultation with the Chairman, amending the wording on the lines discussed at the meeting.

2. That the Panel agree that the Review had adequately scrutinised Streetscene Services.

5. **CLIMATE CHANGE AND GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS**
(EN28 refers)

Councillor Pearson introduced the Report and explained that it had been requested by the Panel at its previous meeting.

During debate, a Member spoke against the recommendation in the Report. Whilst he acknowledged the existence of climate change and the need for recycling, he explained that there were a number of eminent scientists that disputed the theory that it was caused mainly by CO₂ emissions. He suggested that, as there was a doubt in the scientific community, the Council should be more open minded to the possible causes and remedies to tackle climate change. He circulated a paper at the meeting, entitled "Climate Change – A Summary" by the Scientific Alliance. This paper is available from <http://www.scientific-alliance.org/> and a copy has been placed in the Members' Library

The Panel noted that the Council was looking at achieving energy savings in the use of its buildings and transport. The Chairman suggested that Members contact her if they were interested in establishing an Informal Scrutiny Group to examine the Report in further detail.

At the conclusion of date, the Panel agreed to amend the recommendation from "that the Council is using the best available evidence" to "that the Council *should use* the best available evidence."

RESOLVED:

That the Council should use the best available evidence on the causes of climate change on which to base its actions.

6. **PLANNING AND TRANSPORT PORTFOLIO – THIRD QUARTER 2006/07**
PERFORMANCE MONITORING
(Report EN29 refers)

The Director of Development and Councillor Wood introduced the Report and answered detailed questions from the Panel.

During debate, the Panel noted that the Biodiversity Plan had been delayed because of the illness of an officer and that the Council were considering working with other local authorities for the shared appointment of an ecologist.

The Panel discussed the poor performance of determining planning applications within timeframes and the Director explained that an active case management system was helping to speed minor applications through the process. The Panel also noted that, due to a lack of permanent planning officers (a situation which was reflected nationally) it was necessary to employ temporary staff to work towards these targets although this often led to higher establishment costs. Following discussion, the Panel raised concerns that these performance targets would not be met by the year end. However, it acknowledged that there were factors outside the control of the Council that contributed to this performance, which included the number of applications received.

In response to concerns regarding the backlog of enforcement cases, the Director explained that this was largely due to the number of new cases that had arisen (over which the Council also had little control), staff shortages, the large number of

applications dealt with by the Council, the complexity of some cases and pressure from local communities. He added that more detailed performance figures on Enforcement would be available at the next meeting.

In discussing the progress of the Planning Improvement Plan, it was noted that the Planning Advisory Review's report on progress being made against the Plan would be considered at the next meeting along with the relevant business plans. Following discussion, the Panel agreed that the Planning Improvement Plan should be updated as soon as possible. The Panel also noted that measures were being taken to further tighten referrals to Planning Development Control Committee by Parish Councils.

The Panel also noted the progress of the Village Design Statements, the need for the new Park and Ride to take account of commuters that parked then cycled or walked into town and that the negotiations for the new facility's Quality Bus Partnership were on-going.

In response to a question, Councillor Wood explained that the Concessionary Travel Scheme would be reviewed in 2008.

Members highlighted the reduction in car parking income. The Director explained that this was an unanticipated fall that resulted from a number of factors including the temporary closures of Jewry Street and the Leisure Centre car parks and the reduced sales of season tickets and residents' visitor permits. The Director also explained that the Council was in negotiation with its funding partners to recover a £20,000 shortfall in the Swanmore Project.

RESOLVED:

1. That progress being made against agreed budgets and targets be noted.
2. **That Cabinet be asked to give attention to the following issues:**
 - (i) **That performance targets for the speed of determining planning applications are unlikely to be met by year end;**
 - (ii) **That the Planning Improvement Plan be updated at the earliest opportunity;**
 - (iii) **The increasing number of outstanding enforcement cases.**

7. **ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH AND SAFETY PORTFOLIO – THIRD QUARTER 2006/07 PERFORMANCE MONITORING**
(Report EN30 refers)

The Director of Development and Councillor Pearson introduced the Report and answered detailed questions from the Panel.

During debate, the Panel discussed the cost of waste collection per household, the effect of the Alternate Weekly Bin Collection, the year long delay in the development of community risk registers (and the need for emergency planning to be considered jointly with business continuity planning), and cleaning the A34.

RESOLVED:

That the monitoring information contained in the Report be noted.

8. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**
(Report PS265 refers)

Following discussion, the Panel agreed that the presentation on agricultural and rural issues from the National Farming Union should be considered at a separate, informal meeting.

The Panel considered subjects for possible inclusion in the following year's work programme and these included biodiversity, rural amenities and the impact of events such as motocross, and climate change.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Work Programme, as set out on the reverse of the agenda, and as extracted from Report PS265, be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 10.00pm

Chairman