

RESOURCES SCRUTINY PANEL

31 January 2007

Attendance:

Councillors:

Macmillan (Chairman) (P)

Anthony (P)
Clohosey (P)
Cooper
de Peyer (P)
Goodall (P)
Hiscock

Learney (P)
Maynard (P)
Ruffell (P)
Worrall (P)
Wright (P)

Deputy Members:

Councillor Love (Standing Deputy for Councillor Hiscock)
Cllr Verney (Standing Deputy for Councillor Cooper)

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Allgood (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources)

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillors Cooper and Hiscock.

2. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Panel held on 6 December 2006 be approved and adopted.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions asked or statements made.

4. **FINANCE AND RESOURCES PORTFOLIO (ESTATES) – THIRD QUARTER 2006/07 PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

(Report RE39 refers)

The Chief Estates Officer brought to the Panel's attention that commercial arrears and voids had been reduced significantly in the last quarter, with much of the backlog being cleared. Although the working budget would not be updated until after the next Cabinet meeting in February, the General Fund should be within budget at the end of the year.

In response to questions, the Panel noted that there were ongoing negotiations between Winchester City Council and Stonham Housing Association over 57 Romsey Road and the support that could be given to the Association to ensure best use of the property.

In reply to a Member's queries, the City Secretary and Solicitor confirmed that due to staff capacity in the Legal Division, although much of the Estates legal work could be carried out internally, some outsourcing was necessary with current workloads. However, he did not consider that it would be cost effective to create another internal post at this stage.

RESOLVED:

That the monitoring information contained in the Report be noted.

5. **FINANCE AND RESOURCES PORTFOLIO – FINANCE DIRECTORATE THIRD QUARTER 2006/07 PERFORMANCE MONITORING**
(Report RE38 refers)

The Director of Finance reported that, despite efforts to reduce costs following the Publication Review, it had not been possible to do so. Due to agency staff being employed to cover long term sickness absence and high work loads, the budget for Design and Print would be overspent and would be absorbed by the Finance Directorate's budget in the current financial year. The situation would be reviewed in the 2007/08 financial year.

In response to questions, the Director of Finance explained that a digital print review had been undertaken and a report on the findings was made to Cabinet on 13 December 2006. The project would be rolled out as part of the office moves and it was expected that significant savings could be made following implementation.

During discussion, the Director of Finance answered questions on the Digica customer satisfaction survey. A new business manager had been appointed for Digica and discussions had taken place over how to improve the service that staff received. She added that another survey would take place in May 2007, to assess how the implemented changes had affected the service.

It was noted by the Panel that the amended PriceWaterhouseCooper IT Audit report had now been received by the Director of Finance, who explained that there should not be any significant cost implications resulting from the findings. She continued that although there had been an underspend in the IT budget, this related to the funds set aside for the Electronic Document Records Management System. Cabinet approval to proceed would be sought in February 2007 but no monies would be paid until April 2007. The Director confirmed that the funds for this would be carried forward to the 2007/08 budget.

The Chairman requested that the Procurement Officer be invited to a future meeting with a report to update the Panel on the impact which the procurement processes were having on savings for the Council.

Responding to a Member's concern, the Director of Finance reported that although the performance indicators showed the Council was behind target on paying invoices on time, this was measured across the whole organisation. She explained that some sections processed a large amount of invoices and that the figure did not always take into account those invoices that were in dispute.

The Panel asked that the Customer Service Centre and Benefits staff be congratulated on the improvements achieved on their key performance indicators.

RESOLVED:

1. That the monitoring information contained in the Report be noted.
2. That the Procurement Officer be invited to a future meeting of the Panel to update the Panel about progress on the corporate work being undertaken on procurement.

6. **FINANCE AND RESOURCES PORTFOLIO – CITY SECRETARY AND SOLICITOR’S DIRECTORATE THIRD QUARTER 2006/07 PERFORMANCE MONITORING**
(Report RE37 refers)

The City Secretary and Solicitor responded to questions from Members, explaining that the increased income in Land Charges was due to the current state of the housing market and that any additional income would go back into the Council’s balances. He added that the Bapsy Bequest was held in reserves and that tax was not payable on interest which accrued. Proposals for the best use of the Bequest would be considered alongside the proposals for new Council offices and Members were reminded of the terms of the Bequest.

During debate, the Panel also discussed the decreasing numbers of non-members participating at member meetings. The City Secretary and Solicitor explained that this was due to a number of factors, such as Winchester Town Forum Public Consultation meetings taking place later in the year, a smaller number of licensing hearings and Planning Development Control Committee meetings. He added that changes to working practices, such as a move towards more delegated officer decisions, had also impacted on the number of meetings that actually took place.

The City Secretary and Solicitor reported on the electoral process changes that would be implemented this year, explaining that a comprehensive review of polling stations would need to be completed by 31 December 2007. This would include input from Members and Parish Councils. Councillor Allgood added that 6,000 responses had already been received from the postal voting review and that the new procedures for postal votes would also be implemented this year.

RESOLVED:

That the monitoring information contained in the Report be noted.

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

The Chief Executive updated the Panel on the progress of the E-Government Informal Scrutiny Group and indicated that a date for report back was due to be considered at its next meeting. The Director of Finance added that a report on the EDRMS project would be submitted to Cabinet on 13 February 2007 for decision. Other projects were also being progressed, including the telephone and internet contracts and e-forms on Selima. She added that Business Process Reviews were also taking place throughout the Council.

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 7.50pm.

Chairman