

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

12 March 2007

Attendance:

Councillors:

Saunders (Chairman)
Rees (Acting Chairman in the Chair) (P)

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

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

Deputy Members:

Councillor Goodall (Standing Deputy for Councillor Busher)
Councillor Verney (Standing Deputy for Councillor Saunders)

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 Hollingbery (Portfolio Holder for Performance and Communications)
Councillor Lipscomb

Others in attendance who did not address the meeting:

Councillors Jeffs and Macmillan

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillors Saunders (the Chairman) and Busher (the Vice-Chairman). Therefore, Councillor Rees was elected Chairman and Councillor Spender Vice-Chairman for this meeting only.

2. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 January 2007 be approved and adopted.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Councillor Lipscomb and Mr Grant (Shabby Winchester Group) spoke on "streetscene" issues and their comments are set out under the relevant report below.

4. **FOLLOW UP FROM THE SHABBY WINCHESTER GROUP AND "STREETSCENE" ISSUES**

(Oral Report)

At the previous meeting of the Panel, held on 24 January 2007, Members received a presentation from the Shabby Winchester Group which highlighted many of the issues that had been considered by the Streetscene Informal Scrutiny Group (Report EN31 refers). During consideration of these issues at that meeting, Members requested that representatives from Hampshire County Council attend the Panel's next meeting as many of the matters raised were the responsibility of the County Council.

The Chairman therefore welcomed to the meeting, Mr Wilson and Mr Higgins. Mr Wilson was Hampshire County Council's Highways Manager for the City Council's area and his responsibilities included the maintenance of roads and footpath surfaces. Mr Higgins was the County Council's officer responsible for street lighting.

During public participation, Councillor Lipscomb spoke of his concerns regarding the condition and maintenance of pavements, street lamps and other street furniture in Winchester town centre. Whilst acknowledging that not all the problems were within the City Council's ownership or control, he suggested that most of the issues involved a simple clean or repaint to rectify and that the City Council should do all it could to improve the aesthetics of the area.

Mr Grant reiterated the concerns raised at the previous meeting and reported that, subsequently, there had been some improvements promised to the street lighting columns in College Street; he requested that these should be painted black. He added that the Group had begun to take details of all accidents suffered by the public due to the poor state of some of the pavements. On another point, more work was needed to prevent inappropriate traffic using narrow roads in the town centre. Graffiti remained a particular problem.

In response to Members' questions, Mr Wilson explained that the County Council operated an initiative to reduce the clutter of street signage but that the location and design of signs were heavily regulated by the Government. In relation to the replacement of paving slabs, Mr Wilson stated that their resistance to damage by vehicles was often limited by shallow foundations, so that they did not affect underground utilities. However, there was a programme of works to replace the paving in Winchester High Street between Lower and Middle Brook Streets with slabs more resistant to damage from heavy vehicles.

Mr Wilson added that if there were any specific highways problems in Members' Wards, they should contact him to investigate.

In relation to concerns about graffiti, the Panel noted the work the Council was doing with its partners to clear graffiti as soon as possible, but that this was often delayed because it was necessary to obtain the consent of the landowner before work could begin. The Council was planning discussions with the main utility companies (including the railway station) to ensure a more rapid response to damage on their properties. In addition to those measures, Councillor Pearson suggested that local communities form self-help groups that could work with the Council to tackle environmental crimes.

Mr Higgins commented that the County Council consulted with the Conservation Officer on the colour and design of street lamps in the Conservation Area. All street lamps had to comply with national regulations to prevent light pollution.

RESOLVED:

That Report be noted.

5. **BUSINESS PLANS 2007/08 ONWARDS**
(Report EN36 refers)

Councillor Hollingbery introduced the Report by requesting that the Panel should concentrate more on an overview of the wider issues within its remit, rather than micro-managing detailed performance statistics.

The Panel noted that the detailed Business Plans were due to be approved by the relevant Portfolio Holders.

Members considered and asked detailed questions in relation to Appendix 2 – Extracts from Draft Business Plans. During this discussion, the following points were made:

Strategic Planning:

Members were concerned as to whether value for money was being achieved from the front loading public consultation exercises on the Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy. In response to concerns about whether the process would be properly resourced, the Chief Executive explained that if further funds were required, a supplementary request would be submitted to Cabinet. A Member suggested that the LABGI grant could be used to help fund collating the LDF's evidence base which, due to its complexity, may have to be undertaken by outside specialists.

Access and Infrastructure:

The Director of Development answered questions relating to the new powers of parking attendants, the backlog of traffic regulation orders, officers' work in dealing with the Winchester Access Plan and the Concessionary Travel Scheme, and the possibility of energy savings by switching off street lights in the early hours.

Planning Development Control:

Members debated the performance of the Teams in Planning Development Control and noted that each application was now closely monitored as it progressed through the planning system. In relation to enforcement cases, it was noted that there was a computer problem that prevented the publication of an automated list for Ward Members, but it was hoped that this would be rectified.

Building Control:

During debate, the Panel noted the long period in the Plan set aside for office moves and the work related to enforcement of the new energy regulations in 2010 and 2013.

Environment:

Councillor Pearson explained the target satisfaction figures and projected costs for the refuse collection service. Progress against the Air Quality Management Improvement Plan would be reported to the Informal Member/Officer Group on 15 March 2007. It was also noted that the enforcement of the smoking ban in pubs and restaurants from April 2007 would be undertaken within the existing Environment Team, with additional resources from the Government.

RESOLVED:

1. That, having regard to the Council's agreed Corporate Policies on a High Quality Environment and an Efficient and Effective Council, the Panel recommends to the Portfolio Holders no changes to the Business Plan extracts as set out in Appendix 2 of Report EN36.

2. That future performance monitoring reports to be submitted to the Panel include information relating to;

- i) efficiency savings relating to the remit of this Panel;
- ii) speed of determining planning applications and other issues relating to the Planning Improvement Plan;
- iii) value for money regarding the front-loaded consultation processes of the Local Development Framework and overall progress with the development of the LDF;
- iv) the progress of Building Control policies relating to Climate Change.

6. **PLANNING ADVISORY SERVICE PEER REVIEW FEEDBACK**
(Report EN32 refers)

Councillor Wood introduced the Report and answered detailed questions from the Panel.

During discussion, the Panel noted the importance of Planning Development Control Committee Members receiving good quality training and broadly disagreed with the report's criticism of Councillors. In reply, Councillor Wood stated that he did not agree with all of the Report's recommendations, but that they could perhaps be reviewed by a future Informal Scrutiny Group.

In response to a question, Councillor Wood confirmed that he was monitoring the processing of Section 106 Agreements.

RESOLVED:

That the Report be noted.

7. **DEVELOPMENT CONTROL SERVICE – UPDATE ON IT ISSUES**
(Report EN33 refers)

Councillor Wood introduced the Report and answered detailed questions from the Panel.

During discussion, the Panel noted that other Planning Authorities were suffering similar IT difficulties and the Group agreed that progress on IT issues in relation to the Development Control Service should be reported to future meetings.

RESOLVED:

That the Report be noted and that progress on IT issues in relation to the Development Control Service be reported to future meetings.

8. **PLANNING PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN**
(Report EN35 refers)

Councillor Wood introduced the Report and answered detailed questions from the Panel.

The Panel noted that there would be a business process review of the Planning Administration Service and that officers had visited Salisbury District Council, whose better performance appeared to primarily relate to more experienced administration staff. However, the Director of Development explained that, as staff turnover in Winchester's Planning Administration Team stabilised, performance had improved and that was expected to continue.

In acknowledging that the Plan's progress would be reported to future meetings, the Director explained that investigation would take place into measurement and reporting mechanisms for assessing the success of the pre-application service.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and progress be reported to future meetings of the Panel.

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

The Panel noted that at its meeting on 27 February 2007, the Scrutiny Chairs Liaison meeting had proposed that this Panel consider establishing in the next Municipal Year an Informal Scrutiny Review Group on Major Outdoor Events. It also noted that the Local Economy Scrutiny Panel was likely to review the Council's relationship with the farming community and would seek representatives from this Panel.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Work Programme, as set out on the reverse of the agenda, and as extracted from Report PS275, be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 9.20pm

Chairman