

SOCIAL ISSUES SCRUTINY PANEL**9 March 2011****Attendance:**

Councillors:

Love (Chairman) (P)

Achwal (P)
Coates (P)
Clear (P)
Cooper (P)
FallGemmell (P)
Hammerton (P)
Prowse (P)
Weston
Witt (P)**Deputy Members in attendance:**

Councillor Berry (Standing Deputy for Councillor Weston)

TACT Representatives:

Mr Rickman and Mrs White

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Thompson (Portfolio Holder for Communities)

Others in attendance who did not address the meeting:

Councillor Tait

1. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Councillor Thompson declared a personal and prejudicial interest, due to her involvement as a Cabinet Member in actions taken or proposed in the Reports outlined below.

However, the Panel requested that she remain in the meeting, in her capacity as Portfolio Holder, under the provisions of Section 21(13) (a) of the Local Government Act 2000, in order that she could provide additional information to the Panel and/or answer questions.

Councillor Love declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest in respect of the Public Participation item as he was acquainted with the speaker, Mr Hibbert-Hingston through his involvement with the Winchester Churches. There was no voting on this item.

2. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held 1 February 2011 be approved and adopted.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Mr M Hibbert-Hingston addressed the Panel on behalf of the Winchester Street Pastors.

In summary, he stated that the Street Pastors movement had originated in London in response to anti-social behaviour. An objective was to care, listen and help young people by building relationships. The delivery of pastoral services was through the Urban Trinity, which involved the church, Local Government and the Police working in partnership.

In Winchester, 44 volunteers had been recruited from the town's churches to be available in the town centre between the hours of 10.00pm and 4.00am on Fridays and Saturdays from 18 June 2011. If resources permitted, the scheme would also be extended to include Thursday nights. All volunteers would be trained and appropriately checked.

The start up costs of the scheme was £33,000 for one full time salary, uniforms and radios. Thereafter, annual running costs were estimated at £20,000 per annum.

The Chairman thanked Mr Hibbert-Hingston for his presentation and referred the Panel to Report SO126 (Draft Detailed Change Plan 2011/12 – Active Communities), considered below, where the Scheme was included as an action under Outcome 4 – Low levels of crime.

4. **DRAFT DETAILED CHANGE PLAN 2011/12 – ACTIVE COMMUNITIES** (Report SO126 refers)

The Corporate Director (Operations) answered questions from the Panel on the Commissioning process. He confirmed that core funding to meet year on year costs would continue to be provided to external organisations that assisted in achieving Change Plan outcomes. Additional funding could also be provided for specific projects.

The Panel agreed that the Change Plans would benefit from improved presentation, with more comprehensive and clearer wording, in order that outcomes were clear and well expressed.

Discussion took place on Outcome 2 – Supporting Local People to access high quality, affordable housing. Mr Rickman stated that, at a national level, the outlook for affordable housing provision had worsened as a result of spending reductions. Councillor Thompson added that there were concerns over affordable housing provision to meet local need and she was meeting with neighbouring local authorities to consider a way forward. The Corporate

Director (Operations) stated that an all Member Seminar would be held in the near future on this subject.

In respect of Outcome 3 – Children and Young People, it was clarified that the rationalisation of the City Council's play areas was not a reduction, but involved working with Parish Councils to seek their improvement to a level where they could be taken over by the Parishes. In addition, the transfer of the Meadowside Recreation Ground and play areas to Whiteley Parish Council was intended to be on a freehold basis, with restrictive conditions on its future development.

Under Section 5 – Low Levels of Crime, the Panel welcomed the proposed outcome of encouraging students to engage with the local community and asked if this initiative could be explored throughout the District, as well as in Stanmore, Winchester. The Corporate Director (Operations) explained that this proposed outcome was specifically targeted at the University of Winchester, as many students lived within the Stanmore community and there had been issues of disturbance to residents, particularly at night. The Council's Head of Community Safety was a coordinator of this scheme. Members also commented that rural crime should also be acknowledged.

Under Outcome 5 – Reducing Health Inequalities, the Head of Sports and Physical Activity clarified that the target of reducing childhood obesity levels to 1 in 6 children in Year 6, was based in relation to the national figure of 1 in 5 children being classified as being obese at this age level. The Head of Community Wellbeing also provided details of the division of her time between the City Council and NHS Hampshire. She stated that in many respects her work for the two organisations was interlinked and complementary.

RESOLVED:

That the relevant Portfolio Holders be informed that the draft detailed Change Plan would benefit from improved presentation, with more comprehensive and clearer wording, in order that outcomes are clear and well expressed.

5. CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF THE CASH OFFICE SERVICE
(Report SO125 refers)

The Head of Revenues explained the current usage of the Cash Office and the alternative methods of payment that were available, as detailed in the Report. The options for consideration were the transfer of the Cash Office into the Customer Service Centre, which would release accommodation with the potential to raise rental income; to close the Cash Office; or to continue provision of the Cash Office Service in its current location.

To move the Cash Office from its current location would release space to generate income for the Council, but there would be costs involved in the refurbishment of the Customer Service Centre, estimated at between £75,000 and £100,000.

To close the Cash Office would reduce the customer interface, as customers making payments may make other enquires on their visit. If the alternative of using the Post Office for payment of rent and Council Tax was used, then this would be the highest cost option to the Council, with the use of direct debit being the least cost option. If the Cash Office was closed, there would remain the need for a back office cash office function to process payments. There was the potential to reduce staff costs by one full time equivalent post.

TACT had responded to the consultation by stating that the Cash Office provided a valuable service and that it should be retained. Individual responses from TACT members had also been received: two were in support of closure, four supported its retention in its current location and nine supported a move to the Customer Service Centre. It had also been commented that the Cash Office's present location had disadvantages due to its small size, which sometimes led to outside queuing.

Mr Rickman (TACT) added that the previous location of the Cash Office in the Customer Service Centre had also led to long queues causing conflicts with other users of the area. There remained the possibility that to close the Cash Office would result in tenants falling behind with their payments. Mrs White (TACT) added that the option of using the Post Office (which was located in W H Smith, High Street, Winchester) was not supported as it had poor access, particularly for the disabled.

In answer to Members' questions, the Head of Revenues explained that:

- all potential locations for a new Cash Office in the Customer Service Centre would be investigated;
- that some payments at the counter were made in cash;
- that Test Valley Borough Council did not have a Cash Office (but it did not have its own housing stock);
- that Havant Borough Council was considering closing its Cash Office, and;
- that several other Hampshire districts did have a Cash Office.

During debate, Members commented that the Cash Office still met customer needs, particularly for the elderly, and that the service should be retained. In considering the options for the future of the Cash Office, the majority of Members supported the continued provision of the Cash Office service in its current location, with a minority being in favour of its transfer to the Customer Service Centre – there were no Members in support of its closure.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet be informed that the Panel supports the continued provision of the Cash Office service in its current location and that no wider matters be asked to be investigated.

6. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME (REPORT PS440 REFERS) AND MATTERS ARISING.**

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Work Programme, as set out on the reverse of the agenda, and as extracted from Report PS440, be noted.

7. **VOTE OF THANKS**

As this was the last meeting of the Panel, the Chairman thanked Members and officers who had contributed to the Panel's work and the Chairman's thanks were reciprocated accordingly by all those present.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 7.50pm

Chairman