

**RESOURCES SCRUTINY PANEL****17 March 2011****Attendance:**

Councillors:

Henry (Chairman) (P)

Achwal  
Huxstep (P)  
Higgins (P)  
McLean (P)Mitchell (P)  
Ruffell (P)  
Verney (P)  
Wright (P)**Deputy Members in attendance:**

Councillor Power (Standing Deputy for Councillor Achwal)

**Others in attendance:**

Councillor Learney (Leader with responsibility for Transformation and Resources)

---

**1. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

Councillor Learney 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 Councillor Learney remain in the meeting, in her capacities as Leader with responsibility for Transformation and Resources, 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.

**2. MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held 10 February 2011 be approved and adopted.

**3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

No statements were made or questions asked.

4. **DRAFT DETAILED CHANGE PLAN 2011/12 – EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE COUNCIL**

(Report [RE100](#) refers)

The Chief Executive explained that the Change Plans for Efficient and Effective Council were internally focused and were principally derived from the Transforming Winchester Programme, which built on self assessment and recent peer reviews. The Change Plan did not detail business-as-usual items, as it focussed on exceptions and was a key document to hold the Council to account. It was noted that performance management systems would remain under the new overview and scrutiny arrangements.

In response to questions about changing the City Council's corporate culture, including flexible working, Councillor Learney stated that the objectives of change were to make the Council customer focused, by finding effective ways of doing things for residents. This approach included flexible working across teams and changing working practices, including home working and mobile working.

In response to the Panel's comments, Councillor Learney added that the Change Plans represented a statement of direction, with measures towards goals in changing corporate culture, including milestones at which an assessment could be made on progress.

In respect of developing corporate commitment to behavioural change (Code EEC/001.b) the Chief Executive stated that progress against the ten corporate commitments would shortly be assessed, following the results of the Annual 'Best Places to Work' Survey.

The Panel discussed the "1-team approach" (Code EEC/001.3a). The Chief Executive explained that by 29 April 2011 the full policy and procedural framework for the 1-team programme would be in place, following the conclusion of a staff skills survey. Individual projects would be surveyed to make the best use of employee's skills and it was envisaged that most staff would volunteer to undertake roles to assist in their personal development. In terms of recharging for staff time, the costs would follow the individual so that the true costs of the service were accounted for.

In respect of Financial System Upgrade Phase 2 (Code EEC/001.4a), the Head of Finance explained the improvements to financial management that the upgrade would bring. The system would bring increased efficiency and support to the key business decisions throughout the year, for example in reflecting the financial implications of the 1-team programme, improved governance and financial forward planning.

It was important that the right information should be provided, on a timely basis to the correct audiences. These included financial monitoring and forecasting information to the Performance Management Team, Corporate Management Team and the Leader's Board and the development of a "corporate financial dashboard". The information being provided to Performance Management Team was based on exception reporting on major variances, allowing management action to be taken at the earliest opportunity.

Budget Managers would receive system generated reports monthly and Heads of Teams were now receiving a summary of this detailed information.

It was planned that the use of technology would be maximised. The target was to have the General Ledger "Authority Web" in place for the first reporting in the new financial year. The procedural changes implemented with the upgrade to the Financial System had also provided an improved control environment, for example it had facilitated the separation of duties between supplier set up and payments, which had previously been raised as an issue by the external auditors. It was noted that a progress report would be provided to Cabinet in June 2011.

The Head of Finance added that financial reporting for budget managers was flexible to reflect the needs of Heads of Teams. Bespoke reports could be produced on request, or could be generated through self service. For example, bespoke reports were produced for the Guildhall Management to reflect their trading position, which required a profit and loss type account.

With regard to (EEC\001.5a), Review of the Corporate Website, Councillor Learney stated that ways to improve the website were being sought. These included further in-house development by the Council's officers in conjunction with the web provider. In addition, the possible sharing of the website service with Test Valley Borough Council could lead to a reduction in costs.

**RESOLVED:**

That the relevant Portfolio Holder be informed that the Panel notes the Report, subject to minor changes in presentation of the outcomes discussed.

**5. CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF THE CASH OFFICE SERVICE**  
(Report [SO125](#) refers)

An extract of the draft minute of the meeting of the Social Issues Scrutiny Panel, held on 9 March 2011, was circulated at the meeting. It was noted that the Social Issues Scrutiny Panel had resolved that Cabinet be informed that the Panel supported the continued provision of the cash office service in its current location and that there were no wider matters to be investigated.

The Head of Revenues stated that, as a result of the continued decline in the use of cash for the making of payments, it was appropriate to review the future of the Cash Office to make the best use of resources. It was explained that 60% of activity in the Cash Office was from tenants, although the numbers paying in cash for their council house rent was declining, as uptake of the internet and direct debit to make payments increased.

If the current Cash Office was closed, then one option was that it could be relocated to the Customer Service Centre. However, that raised a number of issues, particularly the need for refurbishment works and the limited space available. Alternative methods of payment, such as using the Post Office, were costly options to the Council, particularly when compared with direct

debit. There also remained the residual need to retain the back office functions of a cash office at the City Offices.

The responses of TACT were contained within the Report and within the draft minute extract from the Social Issues Scrutiny Panel. In summary, TACT supported the retention of the Cash Office in its current location. The majority of TACT members who commented individually preferred the option to move the Cash Office into the Customer Service Centre reception area.

Councillor Learney added that, following the setting of the Council's budget, there was now no paramount need to close or move the Cash Office. It was noted that some TACT members supported its move to the Customer Service Centre, but it was also recognised that there were some negative issues arising, primarily its restricted space. Although the closure of the Cash Office in its present location could release space for external letting to generate rent, the Council did not have specific tenants waiting to occupy that space, so there was no immediate financial imperative for its closure or to move to the Customer Service Centre. It was also recognised that the Cash Office provided a valuable service, particularly to the Council's housing tenants.

In response to questions from Panel members, Councillor Learney stated that the busy times for the Cash Office were Mondays and Tuesdays, at the start of the month, when outside queuing could take place and that often coincided with pension collection days. A survey of customers indicated that one-third of Cash Office users were in excess of 65 years of age.

The Head of Revenues added that Test Valley Borough Council did not have a Cash Office, but did not collect rent, as it had disposed of its housing stock. It had made arrangements with the Post Office to receive payments. Havant Borough Council was also considering the closure of its Cash Office from August 2011, but the majority of Hampshire districts did retain a Cash Office.

It was noted that Appendix C of the Report detailed that the cost of using the Cash Office was £1.00 per payment, as opposed to £0.02 for each transaction by direct debit. A Member suggested that consideration should be given to providing incentives to pay by electronic means. The Head of Revenues responded that Council Tax legislation did provide for such incentives and that some Councils had encouraged take up by means of a prize draw. For comparison, 80% of Council Tax payments were made by direct debit compared with 45% for the payment of rent by tenants.

Following debate, the Panel supported the continued provision of the Cash Office service in its current location. It was also supportive of keeping the future of the Cash Office under review, as customer preferences for the making of payments may change over time. The Panel was interested to know the impact experienced by other district councils when closing their cash offices and supported the investigation of providing incentives for payments to the Council by, for example, direct debits and other more efficient methods of collection.

RESOLVED:

**That Cabinet be informed that the Panel supports the continued provision of the Cash Office service in its current location and that the provision of incentives, to make payments to the Council by direct debit and other more efficient methods of collection, 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. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

RESOLVED:

1. That in all the circumstances, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

2. That the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business because it is likely that, if members of the public were present, there would be disclosure to them of 'exempt information' as defined by Section 100I and Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

| <u>Minute Number</u> | <u>Item</u>                            | <u>Description of Exempt Information</u>   |
|----------------------|--|--|
| ##                   | Exempt minutes of the previous meeting | ) Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person |
|                      | Expiry of the Council's older leases   | ) (including the authority holding that information). (Para 3 Schedule 12A refers)   |

8. **EXEMPT MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED:

That the exempt minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 February 2011 be approved and adopted.

9. **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 8.05pm

Chairman