

THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17 September 2012

Attendance:

Councillors:

Pines (Chairman) (P)

Cook (P)

Evans (P)

Gemmell (P)

Gottlieb

Hutchison (P)

Learney (P)

Read (P)

Sanders (P)

Scott

Wright (P)

Deputy Member

Councillor Lipscomb (Standing Deputy for Councillor Gottlieb)

Councillor Phillips (Standing Deputy for Councillor Scott)

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Godfrey (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Administration)

Councillor Huxstep (Portfolio Holder for Environment)

1. **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

Councillors Godfrey and Huxstep declared personal and prejudicial interests, due to their involvement as Portfolio Holders in actions taken or proposed in the Reports outlined below.

However, the Committee requested that the above Councillors remain in the meeting, in their capacity as Portfolio Holders respectively, under the provisions of Section 21(13) (a) of the Local Government Act 2000, in order that they could provide additional information to the Committee and/or answer questions.

2. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting the Council's newly appointed National Management Trainees, Sara-Kay Martindale and Lorna Box, who would be observing proceedings.

The Chairman also advised that, in response to some concerns raised during the initial period of their operation, he was considering requesting scrutiny on the operation of the Biffa Waste Management, Landscape, and Osborne Housing

Maintenance contracts. He advised that he would welcome suggestions as to how to best deal with this matter as part of the Committee's consideration of the Scrutiny Work Programme later on the agenda.

3. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 9 July 2012 (less exempt items), be approved and adopted.

4. **CAPITAL STRATEGY AND PROGRAMME 2012/13 – 2015/16**
(Report CAB2378 refers)

The Committee noted that at its meeting held on 12 September 2012, Cabinet had approved the recommendations of the Report as set out, including those for recommendation to Council, subject to the Committee considering under its powers of call-in the approval of a supplementary capital estimate to support improvements to the Council's shared IT infrastructure.

Councillor Godfrey introduced the Report and drew particular attention to those areas of the Strategy and Programme that had been updated since its original approval in February 2012. He explained the Council's current Capital Financing Requirement, the use of reserves, including funding from asset sales, and the potential to utilise borrowing to support some unfinanced capital expenditure. Attention was drawn to Cabinet's approval of changes to the Strategy and Programme to support improvements to the Council's shared IT infrastructure, and also the implications of Housing Finance Reform and changes to the rules with regard to Right to Buy capital receipts. Investment in shared IT infrastructure was likely to create further efficiencies over time.

During discussion, Councillor Godfrey explained that it was necessary to take a long-term view with regard to options for repairs and improvements to the River Park Leisure Centre or its replacement with a new facility and that the Council would continue to work closely with its contractor, DC Leisure, to bring forward a satisfactory solution. Sources of finance, including possible private sector contributions, would need to be investigated.

It was also recognised that that urgent investment in City Offices was also required. The Chief Executive explained that it was likely that a report on the matter would be brought forward by the end of the calendar year, subject to ongoing in-depth discussions.

The Head of Finance clarified that changes to financing rules since 1 April now meant that capital receipts previously retained in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to support the Sewage Treatment Works Programme could now be allocated to the General Fund. Councillor Godfrey was satisfied that sufficient

flexibility was retained for the future but the more pressing need was for such receipts to be allocated for General Fund purposes; given the wider scope the HRA had to meet its own requirements as a consequence of Housing Finance Reform.

Councillor Godfrey also updated the Committee on the latest position with regard to possible capital investment in new youth facilities being investigated by North Winchester Youth & Community Action. The Chief Executive advised that the conclusion of a community planning project in Weeke and Harestock would influence this work.

At the conclusion of discussion, the Committee noted that the Capital Strategy to be approved next year was likely to feature projections of the significant investment necessary by the Council in River Park Leisure Centre, City Offices and also the improvements to shared IT infrastructure.

RECOMMENDED:

1. THAT COUNCIL BE ADVISED THAT THE COMMITTEE HAD NO ISSUES THAT IT WISHED TO DRAW TO ITS ATTENTION IN RESPECT OF THE DRAFT CAPITAL STRATEGY AND UPDATED CAPITAL PROGRAMME.

2. THAT THE DECISION OF CABINET ON 12 SEPTEMBER 2012 TO RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL THE APPROVAL OF A SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE OF £217,000 OVER 4 YEARS FOR INCLUSION IN THE PROGRAMME IN RESPECT OF A SHARED IT INFRASTRUCTURE, BE NOT CALLED-IN FOR REVIEW.

RESOLVED:

That the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Administration have regard to the comments of the Committee raised during the discussion.

**5. GENERAL FUND BUDGET - REVIEW 2012/13
(Report OS44 refers)**

The Committee noted that, at its meeting held 12 September 2012, Cabinet had approved the recommendations of the Report as set out.

Councillor Godfrey highlighted that there were few significant changes to the Council's originally approved spending and income plans.

During discussion, the Assistant Director (High Quality Environment) reported that the use of contingencies was inevitable at this relatively early stage of the operation of Environmental Services Contract. He referred to some variations to

the original schedules within the contract. In response to a question, he clarified that the element of the contract with regard to dog waste bins was being reviewed over the longer term, in response to changes to legislation and the requirement for there to be separate bins.

There was discussion on the adverse variance for the Guildhall trading account, and Councillor Godfrey explained that changes were being put into place to improve the Guildhall's overall trading.

RESOLVED:

That the Report be noted

6. **REVISED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME 2012**
(Report CAB2376(LDF) refers)

The Committee noted that, at its meeting held on 12 September 2012, Cabinet had approved the recommendations of the Report as set out. The Cabinet (Local Development Framework) Committee had also considered the Report at its meeting on 5 September 2012.

In response to discussion, Councillor Godfrey clarified that a virement of £71,400 has subsequently been identified as necessary to complete the Local Development Framework (LDF) process. This was a more reliable forecast of project costs that could not have been easily identified when the General Fund budget was originally set and would be retained within the earmarked reserve.

RESOLVED:

That the decision of Cabinet to approve a revenue budget virement of £71,400 from the General Fund Flexible Resource Management budget to the Local Plan budget, be not called-in for review.

7. **CONSULTATION – COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT AND COUNCIL TAX CHANGES**
(Report OS50 refers)

Councillor Godfrey introduced the Report and drew attention to the funding shortfall to the Council resulting from the changes, and the options for a local support scheme that the Council were in the process of consulting on. He emphasised that pensioners would see no changes to their existing Council Tax support arrangements.

The Head of Revenues advised that, in addition to inviting consultation via its website, the Council would also be writing to all existing working age Council Tax Benefit claimants. Members would continue to be kept fully informed throughout the transition to a local scheme, and would receive a copy of the consultation

letter so that they could assist constituents with any question that they might have.

During discussion, Councillor Godfrey clarified that following the consultation process, decisions on which local scheme to adopt would be based around minimising the overall impact on claimants, and to the Council Tax payer in general, as well as being as broadly cost neutral to the Council as possible.

The Committee referred to each of the options for changes to Council Tax support as set out in the Executive Summary of the Report. Members also discussed the examples of the additional amount that working age householders would have to pay to fund each of these (Appendix A to the Report refers).

At conclusion of discussion, the Committee were generally not in favour of options d, e and f (the latter being a combination of d and e) but also wished to be assured that all potential unintended consequences of a – d had been thoroughly investigated. For example, a Member suggested that abolishing discounts for empty homes could inadvertently prejudice the building of homes by developers, should they be unable to immediately sell a house on its completion. The Committee also requested that the Portfolio Holder investigate any other further local support schemes that might have been proposed by other councils since this Council's consultation exercise had commenced.

RESOLVED:

That the Portfolio Holder for Finance & Administration have regard to the comments of the Committee, as set out above, raised during the discussion.

8. **COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY THE COUNCIL 2011/12**
(Report OS46 refers)

The Chief Executive reminded the Committee that although MP's letters were currently recorded as 'complaints', many were not necessarily about failure of process, and were rather about residents who were unhappy with decisions made, such as housing allocations.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

9. **PROJECT INTEGRA AND RECYCLING INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP – RECOMMENDATIONS**
(Report OS52 refers)

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting former Councillor Thompson, who had led the Informal Scrutiny Group (ISG) on its work. At the invitation of the

Chairman, Mrs Thompson introduced the Report and, in summary, commended its recommendations for approval. It had been demonstrated to the ISG that improving the 'capture rates' of recyclable materials across the District could be achieved, especially if the Council worked with its partners and other key organisations.

The Assistant Director (High Quality Environment) reported on the outcome of the recent review of the Project Integra Partnership which had concluded that its scrutiny should be passed to individual local authorities within its area.

Councillor Huxstep also reminded the Committee that a key priority of the Project Integra Partnership was to increase the capture rate of recyclable materials.

During discussion, the Committee noted that although a recycling service was costly to operate, further capital investment in recycling facilities was likely to assist in increasing capture rates. This in turn would generate more income from sales of materials. It was reported that the County Council had recently agreed that a food waste processing plant be constructed in Hampshire.

The Committee referred to wider cultural change that might potentially increase recycling, such as the development of 'circular economies'. It was agreed that this would be a useful topic for a future Member Briefing session and the Assistant Director (High Quality Environment) undertook to consider the matter.

RECOMMENDED:

1. THAT COUNCIL ENDORSE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PERMANENT JOINT PROJECT INTEGRA SCRUTINY PANEL (JPISP) WITH EAST HAMPSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL AS DESCRIBED IN SECTION 2 OF THE REPORT AND NOMINATE THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE (COUNCILLOR PINES) AND ONE CONSERVATIVE AND ONE LIBERAL DEMOCRAT MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE (TO BE CONFIRMED AT FULL COUNCIL).

2. THAT DELEGATED AUTHORITY BE GRANTED TO ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (HIGH QUALITY ENVIRONMENT) AND THE HEAD OF LEGAL SERVICES TO FINALISE DOCUMENTAION ASSOCIATED WITH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PROJECT INTEGRA SCRUTINY PANEL (JPISP).

RESOLVED:

1. That The Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorse the following recommendations of the Informal Scrutiny Group as set out below and recommend them to Cabinet for implementation

- a) In partnership with East Hampshire District Council the City Council should develop a behavioural change campaign aimed at:
 - (i) increasing recycling capture rates,
 - (ii) exploiting any new opportunities for collecting recyclables,
 - (iii) reducing contamination of recyclables.
- b) The campaign should inform and support the work of the shared Partner Implementation Plan with East Hampshire District Council.
- c) Any initiatives within the campaign should be subject to consideration of business cases and only introduced where it is cost effective to do so. Priority should be given to those materials with the greatest income potential.
- d) The campaign should be a combination of District wide publicity and specific campaigns to targeted areas where capture or contamination issues are known to exist.
- e) In order to support recommendation c), the partnership should make the best use of the Materials Analysis facility in order to identify the priority areas.
- f) The campaign should include reminders about the previous materials that could be recycled as well as clear information about new materials such as aerosol cans and metal bottle tops/jar lids.

10. **PUBLIC ACCESS TO DATA AND INFORMATION VIA THE WINCHESTER CITY COUNCIL WEBSITE INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP - RECOMMENDATIONS**

(Report OS51 refers)

As Chairman of the Informal Scrutiny Group (ISG) Councillor Wright introduced the Report. In summary, he urged officers and Members to continue to come forward with ideas to ensure the website remained both informative and relevant. He reminded Members that the website would ultimately save the Council time and money if correct information was available and easily obtainable.

During discussion, and in response to a suggestion, the Head of Communications supported the deletion of the final sentence of recommendation (vi) with regard to Mapping. It had been noted that since publication of the Report, Google had recently announced a potential charging regime and/or use of adverts.

The Head of Communications also advised that the Council's website would continue to evolve with regard to its ease of use via mobile devices. Further Winchester specific downloadable applications were also under development and

it was acknowledged that these should ideally be available to all operating platforms.

The Corporate Director (Governance) suggested that recommendation (xi) be amended, so that the Portfolio Holder only report to the next meeting if the Chairman of the ISG was not satisfied with Cabinet's response to the ISG's recommendations. This was agreed.

RESOLVED:

1. That The Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorse the following recommendations of the Informal Scrutiny Group as set out below and recommend them to Cabinet for implementation:

- i. *Website*
The website should be seen as the primary point of contact for the Council's residents. All departments should actively participate in ensuring the site is customer focused and transactional, with the aim of becoming more efficient and effective and maximising potential savings.
- ii. *Planning Information*
Corporate Communications Team in conjunction with Planning to review and redesign if necessary the functionality behind the Council's planning portal in line with user feedback. This should take place when the new EDRM system is being incorporated.
- iii. *Licensing Information*
Explore resources available to create a Licensing Portal based on the improved functionality of the planning portal, and in line with user feedback.
- iv. *Social Media*
The Council should recognise the importance and potential of social media in democracy, and seek opportunities to increase access and to gather feedback before decisions are made in line with the principles of localism.
- v. *Optimisation*
Using feedback via the in-built moderation centre (within the CMS), customer and staff feedback, and analytics to ensure the A-Z works effectively as a navigational tool, and the search engine is as thorough and comprehensive as possible within the limitations of the tool.
- vi. *Mapping*
Create comprehensive mapping resources with user-friendly interfaces of key facilities in and around the District such as car parks, play sites,

community venues and recycling facilities. All data from these maps will be made available as open, 'mashable' data within the Data Hub.

- vii. *Data*
Continue to improve and add relevant data in an open format to the Data hub, building in interactive graphs where required to illustrate data sets making the information more accessible to users.
- viii. *Reporting*
Identify the most useful statistical information to create monthly custom reports for the e-Communications team and Web Officers. This will allow for detailed analysis and aid identification of key areas for improvement in terms of transactional and informational content.
- ix. *Content Optimisation*
Work with Web Officers to improve and restructure content where necessary to provide users with the information they need in the most efficient way (the information will be gathered from feedback and statistical analysis). Focussing on quality of information over sheer quantity as has been the case in the past.
- x. *e-Forms*
Optimise existing e-Forms; streamlining and removing unnecessary fields. All personal fields will be moved to the final page before submission to increase completion rates. The e-Communications Team will work with Web Officers to identify where additional e-Forms would be beneficial. A review of response times to forms coming through the website should be undertaken.
- xi. That the Portfolio Holder be asked to report back to the Committee in 12 months with regard to Cabinet's implementation of the above recommendations.

11. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME (REPORT OS45 REFERS) SEPTEMBER 2012 FORWARD PLAN AND ITEMS FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION**

The Committee agreed that a Report be brought to the meeting of the Committee on 10 December 2012 with regard to the Biffa Waste Management and Landscape contracts. Members wished to be assured that contractors were dealing with occurrences of complaints and operational difficulties apparent during the initial period of the operation of the contracts. The Joint Client Team manager should be invited to attend the meeting. The Committee noted that the Cabinet (Housing) Committee would shortly receive a similar report on the Osborne housing maintenance contract. If that Committee was not satisfied with the response given to concerns raised, this could also be dealt with at the meeting on 10 December 2012.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the above discussion, the Scrutiny Work Programme Forward Plan for September 2012 be noted.

12. **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 minute of previous meeting held 9 July 2012:) Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). (Para 3 Schedule 12A refers)
	• Abbey Mill, Winchester)
	• New Depot Update, Barfield Close, Winchester)

13. **EXEMPT MINUTE**

RESOLVED:

That the exempt minute of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 9 July 2012, be approved and adopted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 8.55pm.

Chairman