

## **THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**21 January 2013**

Attendance:

Councillors:

Pines (Chairman) (P)

Cook (P)

Evans (P)

Gemmell (P)

Gottlieb (P)

Hutchison (P)

Learney (P)

Read (P)

Sanders (P)

Scott (P)

Wright (P)

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillors Wood (Leader), Godfrey (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Administration) and Humby (Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning and Economic Development)

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1. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman introduced Mr Paul Williams, Chief Executive of Winchester Area Community Action (WACA ) to the meeting. He explained that he would invite Mr Williams to comment on the 'Active Communities' outcome in the Council's Change Plans 2013/14 (Report CAB2419 refers).

2. **MINUTES**

During discussion, the Corporate Director (Operations) confirmed that with regard to Resolution 2(c) on page 5, information on the level and frequency of Environmental Contract services (such as grass cutting, bin collection, road sweeping etc) was to be made accessible via the Council's website. Should Councillors require any additional information on services in the areas that they represent, they should contact the Assistant Director (High Quality Environment). With regard to Resolution 2 (d), initial operational issues were likely to be resolved as soon as possible, following negotiations between Biffa and Veolia.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 10 December 2012, be approved and adopted.

3. **EMERGENCY PLANNING – UPDATE ON SCRUTINY REVIEW**  
(Report OS61 refers)

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr Ian Hoult, Head of Emergency Planning, Hampshire County Council.

The Committee referred to progress made against the actions previously identified by the Emergency Planning Informal Scrutiny Group. During discussion, Mr Hoult responded to questions from the Committee, in particular with regard to the County Council's joint working with the City Council, Parish Councils and other community groups in satisfying the obligations of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. He described how vulnerable people in communities affected by emergencies were quickly identified and appropriate priority support targeted. All information related to emergencies was accessible to communities via various means and not just via the internet. He also referred to the County Council's use of social media, notably Twitter, in providing information to communities. The Chief Executive reported that the City Council's own Twitter feed had been particularly useful to Park and Ride customers seeking information related to services during the recent snowy weather.

During further discussion, Mr Hoult reported on the success of the Hambledon Local Flood Action Group and the likelihood of its contribution in reducing the volume of calls to emergency services in times of flooding.

With regard to sand bags, it was clarified that these were issued by County Highways to ensure highways were kept clear and to protect vulnerable groups. Individuals were encouraged to make their own arrangements in line with advice given. The City Council also had limited supplies to be used at the discretion of officers. In response to a comment, Mr Hoult advised that he would remind Highway Officer colleagues that for them to be most effective, sandbags should not be overfilled.

RESOLVED:

That the Report be noted and a further report be brought to this Committee in a year's time on progress on the implementation of the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review.

4. **CHANGE PLANS 2013/14**  
(Report CAB2419 refers)

As part of his introduction to the Report, Councillor Wood explained that further detail of individual Change Plan projects, along with a number of smaller / more local projects, would be set out in Portfolio Holder Plans which would be circulated in March. Portfolio Holders were working with officers to roll forward into 2013/14 priority projects that had not been completed during the previous year.

The Chief Executive also pointed out that the Change Plans were reflective of the Administration's priorities. Those projects detailed in the Appendix to the Report were intended to support delivery of each of the outcomes of the Community Strategy. During discussion, he agreed to circulate a diagram to the Committee to illustrate lines of Portfolio Holder and officer accountability following recently approved changes to the organisational structure of the Council.

The Assistant Director (Economic Prosperity) noted the Committee's request that, where possible, improvements be made to presentation of performance information in Portfolio Holder Plans related to the progress of projects, to allow the Committee to measure success over time.

Members referred to the Efficient and Effective Council outcome and, during discussion, the Chief Executive explained that more efficient working practices in the organisation would mean that officers were able to respond to projects that helped deliver the Council's and Members' priorities. Councillor Wood also reminded the Committee that developing more streamlined internal processes was necessary to help the Council respond to additional budget pressures in forthcoming years.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr Williams (Chief Executive of Winchester Area Community Action) addressed the Committee. In summary, Mr Williams suggested that as Change Plans were high level strategic documents, it would be easier to determine any potential 'gaps' in delivery towards achieving priority areas via analysis of the individual Portfolio Holder Plans. However, with regard to 'What is Important to us' priority section of the Appendix to the Report, he noted that there were few specific references to rural areas or to older people. Mr Williams reminded Members of the contribution to the local economy from the voluntary sector, as an employer, and also its importance through partnership working to help deliver some of the priority areas identified in the Change Plans.

In response to the comments raised, the Chief Executive reported that specific mechanisms to deliver individual projects were to be discussed and he acknowledged that joint working with the voluntary sector might achieve efficiencies in some instances.

The Committee referred to the identification of priority areas in the District with regard to deprivation. It was noted that current indices had demonstrated that these areas were within the Winchester Town area. However, earlier measures had also identified pockets of deprivation in Wickham. Councillor Wood agreed to revisit whether there might be pockets of deprivation in rural areas which should additionally be the focus of the Council.

The Committee also referred to Economic Prosperity outcome and mindful of the current economic climate, discussed whether there should be further emphasis of the Council working with initiatives to help support businesses across the District. The Assistant Director (Economic Prosperity) and Councillor Wood emphasised

that those individual projects to date, and those proposed, had successfully created an environment which was more sympathetic to business and were helping to encourage new business ventures. The Chief Executive agreed to investigate the possibility of incentives with regard non-domestic rate holidays for new business, however he pointed out that the legislative framework was controlled by the Government and it was likely that there was little discretion that could be applied at the local level. It was recognised that there were limitations on what the Council could do in the current economic situation, but it should be recognised that the need to keep the Winchester District economically viable should be a top priority.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Report be noted.
2. That the Cabinet has regard to the comments of the Committee as set out above.

5. **GENERAL FUND BUDGET UPDATE**  
(Report CAB2434 refers)

Councillor Godfrey explained that although most of the uncertainties previously identified, such as the proposed level of Government Grant to the Council, had now been clarified, some remained outstanding. This included the impact on the Revenue budget from the Capital Programme, from future pay rises, as well as the impact of the general economic position.

During discussion, Councillor Godfrey acknowledged that a year-on-year Council Tax freeze would inevitably be at a cost to the Council, regardless of the Government's Council Tax Freeze Compensation Grant. He reminded the Committee that a decision whether to increase Council Tax would be one for full Council.

The Head of Finance explained how one-off and step savings were to be taken forward into the budget and also how reserves were to be dealt with. Some funds, such as the additional Homelessness Grants, had been included in reserves until the detail of how they would be spent was worked up. Further detail would be provided in due course as part of the finalised budget recommendations.

The Chief Executive reminded the Committee that the Council was bound by legislation with regard to its obligation to contribute towards staff pensions and also to auto-enrol employees. Therefore, any suggestion that the organisation opt out of pension arrangements for new starters would be unlawful. Councillor Wood also responded to a question and confirmed that the Council would continue to investigate, on a case by case basis, the potential to outsource additional services currently delivered by the Council.

RESOLVED:

That the updated budget position be noted.

6. **LOCALISM INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP (ISG) – FINAL REPORT**  
(Report OS58 refers)

As Chairman of the Informal Scrutiny Group, Councillor Hutchison introduced the Report.

During discussion, Councillor Hutchison acknowledged confusion amongst communities with regard to the status of neighbourhood and community plans, village design statements etc in planning law and their consistency with the Council's Local Plan policies. The Chief Executive and Councillor Humby agreed that as far as possible, officers should have regard to the work of local communities on such plans as the City Council prepared Local Plan Part 2 and in adopting aspirational planning policies. The Committee requested that Councillor Humby explore with officers how this could best be taken forward.

The Chief Executive also explained that a percentage of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) would be used at the discretion of the local communities, if they had a Neighbourhood Plan in place. The outcome of the Denmead front runner project was awaited to see how this might work in practice.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked the Members of the ISG and supporting officers for their work in undertaking the scrutiny review.

RESOLVED:

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:

1. That any future staff re-structuring should consider re-designating existing posts, or creating new posts, to encourage a more entrepreneurial approach.
2. The City Council should investigate what support parish councils might need to achieve or maintain Quality Parish Council status and, within the constraints of current resources, create a relevant support package. This support should be enshrined within a Localism Partnership Agreement between WCC and HALC within which WCC support for the Quality Parish Scheme, the MDC (Member Development Charter) and CiLCA (the Certificate in Local Council Administration) is expressed.

3. The City Council accept the Hampshire Association of Local Councils' offer to brief officers and Members on the competence framework for the parish sector, to include the Quality Parish Scheme, the MDC and the CiLCA.
4. The City Council should institute a systematic annual programme of training for community leaders, officers, councillors and others to provide them with a good understanding of what can be achieved through good community planning, and how places can be improved at all levels.
5. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review progress against any agreed actions in 12 months time.

7. **FINDINGS OF THE INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP ON ACCESS TO SERVICES IN MARKET TOWNS AND RURAL AREAS**  
(Report OS54 refers)

As Chairman of the Informal Scrutiny Group, Councillor Evans introduced the Report and thanked the officers who had supported the ISG in its work.

Councillor Evans emphasised that there was currently perhaps too much dependence on the internet for some access to services, which was particularly unsuitable for the elderly.

The Committee discussed the use of local printed circulars, such as parish magazines, to convey community information from the Council. The Assistant Director (High Quality Environment) advised that the Council would need to update its list of circulars so as to maximise this potential. Members also referred to the possibility of utilising the reverse of refuse collection timetables or the Council tax bill mailing to convey information, as these were sent to all households.

The Committee agreed that a further recommendation be added to those of the ISG to ensure that the progress of agreed actions be reviewed in 12 months time.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked the Members of the ISG and supporting officers for their work in undertaking the scrutiny review.

**RESOLVED:**

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) The City Council should reintroduce some form of annual printed publication for distribution to all households in the District including an investigation into the potential for offsetting costs through advertising or partner contributions;
- b) If the annual printed publication is not adopted then the contact numbers card proposal should be implemented and distribution arranged through existing delivery opportunities;
- c) If funding cannot be found for (b) then alternative options for publicising contact numbers such as adverts in Parish magazines should be investigated;
- d) In order to support implementation of c) all Members should be surveyed in order to refresh the existing list of community publications available in their ward;
- e) Members should be advised of the information leaflets available and supplies provided upon request;
- f) An out of hours ansaphone facility should be included on the main City Council telephone number;
- g) The face to face support available for Hampshire Home Choice applicants should be reviewed particularly for those who do not have easy access to friends or relatives who can assist with the application process. This should include the possibility of commissioning the voluntary sector to provide such support;
- h) That Cabinet have very careful regard when allocating core grants to voluntary organisations to the contributions those organisations make towards assisting people at home (as they were undertaking work that the Council was unable to provide itself);
- i) The City Council should write to Hampshire County Council and request better promotion of the Village Agent scheme, particularly amongst District Councillors who should receive direct contact from the local volunteers;
- j) Further training should be offered to Members on the Hampshire County Council Trigger Tool and its use in assessing the home and fire safety needs of older persons;
- k) City Council services should be reminded to exploit every opportunity to provide face to face promotion and consultation particularly in the rural areas through village shows and fêtes;

- l) The City Council should investigate the use of community buildings for local decision making including planning consent applications which involve viewing sub committees.
- n) That The Overview and Scrutiny Committee review progress against any agreed actions in 12 months time.

8. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME (REPORT OS59 REFERS) AND FEBRUARY 2013 FORWARD PLAN AND ITEMS FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION**

The Chairman reported that the Scrutiny Chairs had supported three topics for 'batch four' scrutiny investigations from a more extensive list of suggestions put forward by all Councillors. Officers had commented as to which ones they considered most appropriate at this time, having regard to priority work areas and availability of resources to support Members' work.

It was agreed that this list be brought to the next meeting of the Committee complete with explanations as to their suitability. It was envisaged that topics would be agreed at the next meeting of the Committee on 18 February 2013 and Group Managers then invited to appoint their membership outside of the meeting, for later endorsement at the next meeting of the Committee.

It was also agreed that the Scrutiny Chairs should continue to act as "Champion" for the reports produced by their groups, when review reports were subsequently brought to The Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the progress made by Cabinet on the implementation of recommendations.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Scrutiny Work Programme and Forward Plan for February 2013 be noted.
2. That a list of topics for 'batch four' scrutiny investigations be brought to the next meeting of the Committee complete with explanations as to the suitability, or otherwise.
3. That the Scrutiny Chairs should continue to act as "Champion" for the reports produced by the Informal Scrutiny Groups, when review reports were subsequently brought to The Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the progress made by Cabinet on the implementation of recommendations.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 9.25pm.

Chairman