

**ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL****13 March 2006****Attendance:**

Councillors:

Pearson (Chairman) (P)

Busher (P)  
de Peyer (P)  
Higgins (P)  
Jackson(P)  
Pearce (P)Spender (P)  
Sutton (P)  
Mather (P)  
Verney (P)  
Wright (P)**Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:**Councillor Beveridge (Portfolio Holder for Planning)  
Councillor Wagner (Portfolio Holder for Environmental Health)**Others in attendance who did not address the meeting:**

Councillor Davies

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**1. MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Panel held on 25 January 2006 be approved and adopted.

**2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions asked or statements made.

**3. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

(Report PS223 refers)

The Panel suggested that in-depths reviews of proposals for the South Downs National Park and its impact on the Local Plan and a review of street scene issues within the District be considered for the next programme of work.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Work Programme, as set out on the reverse of the agenda, and as extracted from Report PS223, be noted.

4. **BUSINESS PLANS 2006/2007**  
(Report EN15 refers)

Councillor Pearson declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest in respect of items that referred to grant aid to the Swanmore Village Centre scheme as he was a member of Swanmore Parish Council that had considered the Village Centre scheme, and he spoke and voted thereon.

The Panel considered the 2006/2007 Business Plans covering services under its remit. The Business Plans were set out as appendices to Report EN15

The Business Plans will form the basis for Portfolio Holders' Performance Monitoring Reports during 2006/2007. The Scrutiny Panel gave consideration to issues that it wished to monitor to ensure that the Council was making progress in key areas during the forthcoming financial year.

(i) **Cultural Services Division Business Plan**  
**(Report EN15, Appendix (i) refers)**

Councillor Beveridge, the Director of Development, the Head of Cultural Services and Principal Conservation Officer were in attendance for this item to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Panel regarding the conservation aspects of the Cultural Services' Business Plan.

Councillor Beveridge reported that the core area of activity in providing advice on conservation matters and dealing with buildings at risk was performing well. Action points were as set out in the Business Plan, and it was hoped that these projects would be financed out of Planning Development Grant, including the implementation of the Winchester Conservation Area Project Action Plan.

In response to questions from the Scrutiny Panel regarding buildings at risk, Councillor Beveridge explained that Cabinet had previously taken a decision that grants for buildings at risk and repairs for historic buildings should not be funded out of revenue, but instead from the Planning Grants Reserve until it was used up. However, it had been recently discovered that the Reserve was not as large as first thought, as it contained a number of committed grants which had not as yet been drawn down as the works had not been completed. The result was that the City Council was now unable to offer any more Historic Building Grants.

The Scrutiny Panel also noted that Hampshire County Council had also scaled back its provision of Historic Building Grants, which might affect churches within the Winchester district as often this was a source of matching funding with English Heritage.

The Scrutiny Panel agreed that the provision of Historic Building Grants was an important function of the City Council, as many visitors came to Winchester to view its very important historic buildings and helped give the District its special character. Moreover, they were an incentive for householders to maintain their properties in a way which was sympathetic to the building and its environment, often requiring more expensive traditional materials and craftsmen. It was agreed that Cabinet should be asked to consider providing additional funding to support the provision of Historic Building Grants. Councillor Beveridge stated that he would convey the Scrutiny Panel's comments to Cabinet, but extra funding could not be guaranteed as Planning Development Grant was still uncertain, and improvements to the Planning

Development Control process and especially the progress of Major Applications remained a priority.

At the conclusion of debate, the Scrutiny Panel agreed that Cabinet should be requested to provide additional funding and that the extra £408,000 that had been received by the Council for Local Authority Business Growth Incentive Scheme Funding might be a suitable temporary source, due to the Historic Building Grants benefit to tourism (and therefore the economy) of the District.

RECOMMENDED:

1. That Cabinet be requested to consider allocating part of the £408,000 Local Authority Business Growth Incentive Scheme Funding for Historic Building Grants.

RESOLVED:

2. That the following points be noted:
  - 2.1 That a measure of success of the initiative to improve understanding of the work of the Conservation Team by means of two open evenings (target No. 14) would be measured by the numbers attending the road shows.
  - 2.2 That the Head of Cultural Services would be presenting a detailed report on the work of the conservation officers to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Panel.
  - 2.3 That the Council should be more pro-active in providing public access where grant aid had been given.
  - 2.4 That in respect of target No. 18, the Conservation Team had an important role in the development of the future use of The Guildhall as part of choices in its future use (including the use of the Bapsy Bequest), and that conservation advice was also part of the Guildhall's internal maintenance regime.

- (ii) Building Control  
(Report EN.15, Appendix (ii) refers)

Councillor Beveridge, the Head of Building Control and the Director of Development answered questions from the Scrutiny Panel.

The Head of Building Control explained that the Section was continuing to experience problems from its CAPS (Uniform) system; particularly in the way data was manipulated from its access database to produce reports. The problem had been reported to the Council's IT Client Section who were seeking a solution. It was noted that the Resources Scrutiny Panel had appointed an Informal Scrutiny Group to look at the IEG programme and related issues. It was agreed that this matter be referred to that Informal Scrutiny Group for its consideration.

RESOLVED:

3. That the following points be noted:

3.1 That the use of mobile computer solutions to enable Building Control Surveyors to operate on site and to contact the City Offices etc through mobile network solutions (target No. 2) was being investigated.

3.2 That it was important for the local authority to take part in a marketing strategy as the Council had a duty to provide a service yet private building control surveying companies and the National House Building Council were very competitive in securing market share (target No. 6).

3.3 That, with respect to Key Performance Indicators, there would be further pressure on the Section to meet its performance figures through major schemes such as the refurbishment of the River Park Leisure Centre in 2006 and modifications to The Guildhall in 2007, and that changes made to the new building regulations would greatly affect performance figures.

3.4 That the Building Control Customer Satisfaction Survey had a sixty per cent return rate.

3.5 That in addition to initiatives on energy efficiency, there was increasingly more emphasis on sustainability issues, and this trend would continue in the future.

(iii) Strategic Planning (Planning elements only)  
(Report EN15 Appendix (iii) refers)

Councillor Beveridge and the Head of Strategic Planning answered questions from the Scrutiny Panel.

RESOLVED:

4. That the following points be noted:

4.1 That the Local Plan Review would contain an updated policy on incorporating sustainability factors within the granting of planning permission.

4.2 That Ward Members be informed through the Members' Briefing Note and City Voice of forthcoming publications being produced as part of the Local Development Framework.

4.3 That affordable housing should be one of the aspects to be monitored within target No. SP.5 – 'protect and enhance the biodiversity of the natural environment and minimise the loss of green fields to development.'

4.4 That, in respect of target no. SP 3, the South Downs Planning Guidelines would be shortly put out for consultation by the South Downs Joint Committee. The City Council had an indication of their content as they were a refinement of the policies under the East Hampshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

4.5 That the Key Performance Indicator returns on affordable housing starts and completions was the responsibility of the Head of

Strategic Housing, but were reported to this Panel to stress the joint working between Housing and Strategic Planning.

4.6 That, with respect to the South Downs National Park, the Public Inquiry was subject to legal challenge and the new National Park might not be introduced until 2007 at the earliest.

(iv) Planning Control  
(Report EN15, Appendix (iv) refers)

Councillor Beveridge, the Director of Development and Head of Planning answered questions from the Scrutiny Panel. Councillor Beveridge circulated at the meeting a revised copy of the Business Plan which made a number of points of clarification.

RESOLVED:

5. That the following points be noted:

5.1 That on page 3 (P4) the reference to Broadway Friarsgate be amended to read Silver Hill.

5.2 That on page 3 (P8), with regard to the Pendleton score, the Council would receive £50,000 for a score of 19 or 20 points, but not £100,000, as would have been the case for a score of 21.

5.3 That the new structure as part of the Planning Improvement Plan would ensure greater control over the management of the service and reduce the possibility of overspend, as had occurred previously principally due to the over-reliance on consultancy. (The Chairman asked that it be recorded in the minutes that there was no measure within the Business Plan to control the cost of the service for the current year compared with previous years).

5.4 That on page 5, target No. 4, the risk of the Silver Hill scheme would be partially offset by a fee income of £50,000 that would be received for this project.

5.5 That on page 6, target No. 8, the cost to the Council of the Itchen Navigation Heritage Trail was £10,000 per annum over five years.

5.6 That on page 8, target no. 15, the employment of enforcement officers was still dependent on the receipt of Planning Development Grant, which had been safeguarded for the forthcoming financial year. However, decisions needed to be made on the continuation of the present level of service in future years thereafter, as it was not in the base budget.

5.7 That regular reports on enforcement be submitted to the Scrutiny Panel in the future (which had not recently occurred due to a problem with the CAPS (Uniform) system).

5.8 That the Director of Development investigates receiving a fee from the Valuation Office at Basingstoke for its access to the Council's database records.

5.9 That on page 9, in respect of item 5 - Resource Implications, the figures be amended to relate to 2005/2006 revised and 2006/2007 estimate.

5.10 That on page 12 it be made clear that reference number DC.1 refers to the average number of cases per planning case officer and that in respect of reference number DC.2, the estimate for increase in fees was explained by anticipated income from major schemes and also an increase in planning fees.

5.11 That on page 14 the anticipated return rate for the Planning Survey was thirty to sixty per cent.

5.12 That on page 15 under Risk Management it was explained that Environmental Health had responsibility for the Council's own trees, but Planning took responsibility for trees not in the Council's ownership but that had amenity value.

(v) Environment  
(Report EN15, Appendix (v) refers)

Councillor Wagner, the Director of Communities and Head of Environment answered questions from the Scrutiny Panel.

RESOLVED:

6. That the following points be noted:

6.1 That a report would be submitted to a future meeting on the maintenance of trees (inspection and remedial work) as part of the Environment Division's risk management.

6.2 That on page 7 (Key Priority 11), each contaminated site was risk-rated and that a report on the funding of the Project Integra Scheme would be submitted to Cabinet in April 2006.

6.3 That on page 7 (Key Priority 15), it was confirmed that the reporting of street scene complaints would be available on the Council's website and would be linked to CAPS by the GIS.

6.4 That on page 9 (Key Priority 18), the Head of Environment explained that it was not possible for the City Council to absolve its responsibilities for health and safety matters by utilising the expertise of national associations for events. This was, for example, the case for the proposed motocross events rather than employing the expertise of the Motocross National Association. It was not possible under the new Licensing Regulations for the Council to impose the recovery of fees associated with major events.

6.5 That on page 13, under Key Performance Indicators, the figures included for 'Target Other' referred to longer term targets and would be reviewed before the Plan was finalised.

6.6 That on page 15, under No. 8 - Risk Management, the Head of Environment was asked to consider the possible inclusion of data on Emergency Planning. It was also requested that the figures beneath "Health and Environment" (2,700 to 2,799) be clarified as being their risk number.

6.7 That on page 17 under the reference to legal requirement for investigation of individual cases and outbreaks of food-borne illness, the figure of 350 related to the number of anticipated cases that could be reported to the Food Standards Agency rather than a target to be achieved.

- (vi) Emergency Planning  
(Extract from City Secretary and Solicitor's Directorate Secretariat Division)  
(Report EN15, Appendix (vi) refers)

RESOLVED:

That the extract from the Business Plan for Emergency Planning be noted as set out.

5. **VOTE OF THANKS**

The Panel thanked the Chairman for his guidance and the officers for their hard work and support during the past Municipal Year.

The Chairman reciprocated appropriately.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 10.40 pm.

Chairman