

LOCAL ECONOMY SCRUTINY PANEL**15 March 2006****Attendance:**

Councillors:

Stallard (Chairman) (P)

Anthony
Bennetts (P)
Berry (P)
Cook (P)
Godfrey (P)Goodall (P)
Love (P)
Pines (P)
Spender (P)
Sutton (P)**Deputy Members:**

Councillor Chapman (Standing Deputy for Councillor Anthony)

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:Councillor Evans (Portfolio Holder for Culture, Heritage and Sport)
Councillor Knasel (Portfolio Holder for Economy and Transport)**Others in attendance who did not address the meeting:**

Councillors Beveridge, Davies, Higgins, Lipscomb, Tait and Verney

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Anthony.

2. MINUTES

Following a request made at the previous meeting of the Panel, Councillor Knasel provided an update on the latest situation with regards to the Gas Works in the City Centre and also the consequential changes to bus routes. It was agreed that the information be circulated to all Councillors outside of the meeting.

Councillor Knasel also mentioned that Southern Gas Networks were operating a compensation scheme for businesses detrimentally affected by the works and this could be accessed through the City Centre Manager, Graham Love. The Chairman suggested that the availability of this compensation scheme should be widely publicised.

Following the invitation of the Winchester Archivist made at the previous meeting, the Chairman advised that four Councillors had attended the recent visit to the Hampshire Archives Office, which they had found to be very interesting and informative.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Panel held on 26 January 2006 be approved and adopted.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Mr Romita, proprietor of the newsagent 'Winchester News' spoke in support of a review of street trading in Winchester town centre to increase the number of permits currently available. In particular, he was proposing to operate a stall selling high quality Italian ice cream in the town. He queried under what circumstances a street trading licence would be issued and requested a report back to the Panel on the matters raised.

The Chairman thanked Mr Romita for his comments and requested that the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Transport respond to him direct.

4. **FAIRTRADE CITY – PROGRESS REPORT**
(Oral Report)

Mr Le Grys and Mrs Archdeacon (Members of Winchester's Fairtrade Group) gave a presentation outlining the history and current work of the Group within Winchester. Mr Le Grys explained that the Group had organised a launch in summer 2005 which had been cancelled due to the Fairtrade Foundation being unable to offer support, because of the unexpected large number of other demands placed upon it. However, work had recommenced and a Fairtrade market had been arranged for the weekend of 17 to 19 March 2006.

Mr Le Grys continued that the Group were currently preparing their application to the Fairtrade Foundation and were hoping to achieve Fairtrade status for the City by summer 2006. Their current work included persuading smaller employers and retailers to participate (some larger groups, for example Marks and Spencers and IBM Hursley had already signed up). Once Fairtrade status had been achieved, the Group were likely to approach the City Council for support by means of representation on the Group and other non-monetary assistance, such as help with publicising the scheme.

In response to Members' questions, Mr Le Grys advised that the current intention was to seek Fairtrade status for Winchester City and Hursley only. However, if this was achieved, it could seek to widen the scope to include other towns and villages.

The Chairman thanked Mr Le Grys for an interesting and informative presentation.

RESOLVED:

That the work of the Winchester Fairtrade Group be noted and their efforts towards achieving Fairtrade status for Winchester be welcomed.

5. **THEATRE ROYAL UPDATE**
(Oral Report)

Ms F Burn (Chief Executive of the Theatre Royal, Winchester) gave a presentation updating Members on the activities at the Theatre Royal and plans for the future. She emphasised the varied programme at the Theatre, including its community, education and outreach work. She advised that every person attending the theatre resulted in an average contribution of £7.77 to the local economy of Winchester, resulting in an annual contribution of £466,000, a return of some £2.27 for every £1.00 of subsidy provided by the City Council. In response to questions, the Director of Development confirmed that the contribution figure was a national average based on information collated from all theatre venues, apart from those situated in the West End of London.

Ms Burn also advised the Panel of other indicators which she believed demonstrated the success of the Theatre, including an average attendance at public performance of 73 per cent (above national benchmarks), nil turnover of staff in the last year in the administrative team, and the Theatre's ability to attract well-regarded performers such as Random Dance.

At the conclusion of her presentation, Ms Burn questions from Members. She also supplied written responses to members of the Panel to the questions raised prior to the meeting.

Questions and responses from Ms Burn made at the meeting are summarised below:

- *What would the effect be on the Theatre of a cut of £20,000 in its annual subsidy from the City Council? Could this £20,000 be better spent by the City Council itself? How did the level of grant compare with similar venues?*

Ms Burn advised that there was insufficient corporate sponsorship to meet this shortfall and consequently the Theatre would have to close or else risk trading illegally within three months.

Ms Burn emphasised that the vast majority of arts venues relied on public funding. For example, The Point in Eastleigh received £240,000. If no such funding were available, it would have a very negative effect on the quality of the performance programme.

- *How did the Theatre balance its professional usage with community use by, for example schools and colleges?*

Ms Burn advised that schools and colleges mainly attended the Theatre to watch shows from its professional programme and she did not envisage there being any difficulties balancing the different elements of the Theatre's work.

- *How did the Theatre intend to utilise new technology to increase attendance?*

Ms Burn confirmed that the Theatre was investigating use of emails, texts etc to this effect and had begun to collect email addresses from its existing patrons.

- *The Theatre's overheads of 49 per cent and 47 members of staff appeared to be excessive?*

Ms Burn explained that the Theatre only employed 16 staff working 30 plus hours per week, and the rest were part-time or only engaged for particular events. Because of the nature of its work, a Theatre's overheads were in general high.

Ms Burn added that the Theatre also had over 100 volunteer members of staff (for example, ushers), which had a value of £26,000 in saved salaries.

- *Could more concessions be offered for the over 60s age-group?*

Ms Burn advised that concessionary rates were already available at about 95 per cent of its performances, including a £5.00 front row ticket for people on lower incomes.

- *Who was responsible for deciding on the professional performance programme? (the Member commented that some people had found some recent performances offensive)*

Ms Burn confirmed that as Chief Executive, she had overall responsibility for this decision, following consultation with the Board of Directors and Observers. Decisions were based upon the desire to achieve a mix of performance offered having regard to what events were touring.

- *How did the Theatre intend to generate links with the new 'Cultural Centre'?*

Ms Burn confirmed that the Theatre was looking forward to working with this new initiative and for example, hoped to link in with the Centre's proposed facility for literary excellence. In addition, the Theatre wished to install an entrance on Tower Street.

- *What steps were being taken to improve social inclusion at the Theatre?*
Ms Burn emphasised the Theatre's community, education and outreach work and believed that it offered many opportunities for a wide variety of people to engage in the arts, for example, Schools' Shakespeare and the Winnall Rock School.

The Chairman thanked Ms Burn for an interesting and informative presentation.

RESOLVED:

That the work carried out by the Theatre Royal, Winchester be noted.

6. **BUSINESS PLANS 2006/07**
(Report LE24 refers)

Councillor Pines declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest in respect of this item due to his involvement with the Winnall Rock School initiative and remained in the room and spoke and voted thereon.

The Panel referred to the Business Plans as set out as Appendices 1 – 4 of the Report and the Director of Development and Director of Communities answered questions and provided additional detail as appropriate regarding specific programmes of work and allocation of resources.

With regard to suggestions for possible work to be undertaken by Informal Scrutiny Groups, the Chief Executive advised that a meeting of the Chairmen of the various Scrutiny Panels and Principal Scrutiny Committee would be held on 13 April 2006. This meeting would consider future work topics for 2006/07 and suggestions would therefore be added to the list of possible work areas to be considered by these Chairmen.

(i) Cultural Services Division (Guildhall, Tourism, Heritage and Arts elements only)

The Director of Development answered detailed questions from Members on the contents of the Plan. The Panel made a number of suggestions as outlined under the resolution below.

RESOLVED:

1. That with regard to the Cultural Services Division Business Plan (Guildhall, Tourism, Heritage and Arts elements only) the following points be noted:

- (i) The Business Plan targets should set out clear definable aims (what is to be achieved) plus specific objectives and/or strategies for achieving those aims. Success criteria should be more specific and include timeframes;
- (ii) The importance of the rural areas of the District should be emphasised;
- (iii) The continued commitment to providing a facility for the display of work from local artists was welcomed.
- (iv) Future Business Plans across the Council should include an additional column indicating to which Scrutiny Panel each element relates to. This was necessary as Scrutiny work overlapped Portfolio responsibility and management areas.

2. That the following issues be identified as possible subjects for future progress reports:

- (i) Regular monitoring reports on the Winchester Guildhall, especially the maintenance plan;
- (ii) Consideration of the requirement for an Informal Scrutiny Group to investigate the value for money of the Museum Services;
- (iii) Reports on the outcome of the proposals for a fund-raising programme to assist in off-setting the £100,000 reduction in budget for this Division in the 2006/07 year.

(ii) Community Development Division (Sport and Recreation elements only)

The Director of Communities answered detailed questions from Members on the contents of the Plan. The Panel made a number of suggestions as outlined under the resolution below.

RESOLVED:

3. That the Community Development Division Business Plan (Sport and Recreation elements only) be supported.

4. That the following issues be identified as possible subjects for inclusion in future monitoring reports or as future progress reports:

- (i) Developing opportunities for widening participation in sports and recreation (for example, the 'over fifties' games);
- (ii) Exercise Referral Scheme;
- (iii) Adopt a School Scheme sports facilities, in particular the River Park Leisure Centre;
- (iv) Report on or scrutiny review of Meadowside Leisure Centre (in particular the management plan, usage and customer satisfaction survey results);
- (v) Community usage of Swanmore College of Technology;
- (vi) Progress of District-wide needs assessment;
- (vii) Progress towards an Excellent Service for Sport.

(iii) Access and Infrastructure Division

The Director of Development answered detailed questions from Members on the contents of the Plan. The Panel made a number of suggestions as outlined under the resolution below

RESOLVED:

5. That the Access and Infrastructure Division Business Plan be supported.

6. That the following issues be identified as possible subjects for inclusion in future monitoring reports or future progress reports:

- (i) Review of changes to Concessionary Travel Scheme, including the impact on community transport schemes;
- (ii) Annual review of on-street and off-street car parking charges;
- (iii) Winchester Town Access Plan;

(iv) Strategic Planning (Local Economy elements only)

The Chief Executive and Director of Development answered detailed questions from Members on the contents of the Plan. The Panel made a number of suggestions as outlined under the resolution below

RESOLVED:

7. That the Strategic Planning Division Business Plan (Local Economy elements only) be supported.

8. That the following issues be identified as possible subjects for future progress reports:

- (i) Evening Economy Strategy;
- (ii) Proposals for Business Improvement District;
- (iii) Progress against the revised Economic Action Plan.

7. **ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN**

(Report LE23 refers)

The Director of Development responded to detailed questions on the Report and the Plan.

The Panel noted that economic prosperity was a fundamental element of the Council's Social Inclusion Strategy and expressed concern that the Action Plan did not join up fully with that Strategy. The Director of Development agreed that this was an omission and that the Action Plan should be amended so that the links between the two documents were clear.

The Panel also asked that the Action Plan more clearly delineate the target groups for action, noting that there were pockets of economic deprivation in many parts of the District. Clear targets for improvement over time were required and should be incorporated into the Action Plan where possible. It was noted that the Local Strategic Partnership had a significant role in achieving economic prosperity outcomes and that it should be clear about the targets it was setting for partners.

The Panel also noted the likely impact of large scale new development on the economy and infrastructure of the District and asked that further consideration be given to this issue before the final version of the Action Plan is produced.

Members noted that the final draft of the Plan would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 22 March 2006 and this would include consideration of the Panel's comments.

RESOLVED:

That the following matters be highlighted for Cabinet's attention:

- (i) Further consideration was required on how those partnerships outlined within the Plan would be scrutinised, including setting performance indicators on key issues (for example, on reducing poverty). The Local Strategic Partnership should have performance indicators;

- (ii) The Plan should specifically identify the areas that it covers, including parish boundaries in order that achieving targets in particular areas could be monitored (for example, in the more deprived areas of the District). Need to identify exactly what is being planned for each part of the City District and give target dates for completion, together with specific success criteria;
- (iii) The wording of the Plan should be changed to make it more positive (for example, "will" instead of "should" or "could");
- (iv) A timetable of for a more comprehensive appraisal should be included.

8. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme for the Panel as set out on the reverse of the Agenda for the meeting be agreed.

9. **VOTE OF THANKS**

As this was the last meeting of the Municipal Year, the Chairman thanked the Members of the Panel for their helpful contributions to debate. The Panel and Vice-Chairman also thanked the Chairman for her work over the course of the year.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 10.15pm

Chairman