

LOCAL ECONOMY SCRUTINY PANEL**17 November 2009****Attendance:**

Councillors:

Anthony (Chairman)
Stephens (Vice-Chairman in the Chair) (P)Bell (P)
Cook (P)
Henry (P)
Humby (P)
Huxstep (P)
Love (P)Pearce (P)
Sanders (P)
Verney (P)**Deputy Members in attendance:**

Councillor Tait (Standing Deputy for Councillor Anthony)

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:Councillor Stallard (Portfolio Holder for Heritage, Culture and Sport)
Councillor Beckett (Leader with Portfolio for Economy and Tourism)

1. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Councillors Beckett and Stallard declared personal and prejudicial interests due to their involvement as Cabinet Members in actions taken or proposed in the Reports outlined below.

However, the Panel asked the Cabinet Members, as Portfolio Holders, to remain in the meeting, under the provisions of Sections 21(13)(a) of the Local Government Act 2000, in order that they could provide additional information to the Panel and/or answer questions.

Councillors Bell, Love and Tait all declared personal (but not prejudicial) interests as members of WinACC. They remained in the room, spoke and voted thereon.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Tait be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Panel for the meeting.

3. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT**

The Chairman thanked management staff at River Park Leisure Centre for arranging a useful and informative tour of the Centre for Panel Members, immediately prior to the start of the meeting.

4. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held 21 July 2009 be approved and adopted.

5. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions asked or statements made.

6. **PRESENTATION FROM CHAIRMAN OF WINACC ON LOW CARBON ECONOMY**

(Oral Report)

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr Robert Hutchison, Chairman of WinACC and also of the High Quality Environment Group of the Winchester District Strategic Partnership.

Mr Hutchison emphasised the need for urgent action to address climate change and for local authorities to take a lead in moving towards a low carbon economy. He highlighted the economic opportunities available in introducing low carbon technologies, thought to be in the region of £4.5 trillion globally within the next five years. It was estimated that environmental initiatives would create approximately 400,000 jobs nationally, and Mr Hutchison suggested that Winchester could aim to secure 2,000 of those jobs within its District.

Mr Hutchison advised Members of the types of new employment opportunities which could be available, which included new building technologies and sustainable transport. He suggested that, due to its proximity to Southampton and the work being carried out at Southampton University, the Council should focus on low carbon energy and renewable energy (such as tidal or wave power).

Mr Hutchison mentioned that, at a recent presentation by Cala Homes on their proposed development at Barton Farm, the possibility of "Micro Economic Zones for Entrepreneurs" was highlighted.

In conclusion, Mr Hutchison emphasised that it was vital that the City Council worked jointly with the County Council in tackling climate change issues and developing a low carbon economy. In addition, the Council should prepare a Strategy on this issue as a matter of urgency.

The Chairman thanked Mr Hutchison for his presentation.

In response to questions, Mr Hutchison advised that he addressed Cabinet at its meeting on 12 November 2009 and expressed some concern that the

Council was not adequately resourced to address climate change issues. For example, he believed that the Council should have in-house expertise on renewable energy and take a proactive approach in offering advice to entrepreneurs and community groups on low carbon initiatives.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation from Mr Robert Hutchison (representing WinACC) be noted.

7. **ISSUES OF ACCESS FOR BUSINESSES BASED AT WHITELEY – VERBAL UPDATE FROM THE HEAD OF ACCESS AND INFRASTRUCTURE**
(Oral Report)

The Panel received an update from the Head of Access and Infrastructure regarding access issues in Whiteley and the surrounding area. In particular, he acknowledged difficulties with lack of capacity at Junction 9 of the M27. He advised that Transport for South Hampshire were currently undertaking three studies, which would all feed into decisions to be taken to address access issues in the area. These studies were:

- M27 corridor junctions 5 to 12 study;
- Access to Gosport study;
- Delivering a Sustainable Transport System (DaSTS) study.

In addition, he mentioned that, at its last meeting on 12 November 2009, Cabinet had agreed to the establishment of a North Whiteley Development Forum, which would consider such matters in greater detail.

The Head of Access and Infrastructure advised that he would supply copies of his presentation to Panel Members outside of the meeting.

In response to questions, the Head of Access and Infrastructure confirmed that the possibility of rapid bus services being utilised for Whiteley would be examined.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the presentation be noted.

8. **PRESENTATION FROM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFFICER ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICE**
(Oral Report)

The Panel received a presentation from Kate Crawford, the Council's Economic Development Manager, detailing the various aspects of her work and she responded to questions, as summarised below.

Ms Crawford agreed to contact the Winchester BID organisation regarding the demand for retail discounts on city centre parking tickets.

With regard to how the success of the economic development service was measured, Ms Crawford advised that various indicators were reported to the Economic Prosperity Outcome Group. She also kept records of feedback from attendees of the various events held, alongside records of the number of enquiries received, and more general indicators such as the unemployment rate and the number of VAT registered businesses in the District.

In response to a comment that Winchester was becoming too elite and exclusive in its mix of shops, Councillor Beckett emphasised the very high level of occupancy of town centre retail units, particularly in comparison with other towns nationally during the current economic climate. In addition, he stated that the Winchester BID recognised that people did not generally use the town centre for everyday shopping, as this was available from other places, such as the various supermarkets on its periphery.

Members commented on the success of the various activities that took place in the summer to encourage the early evening economy. Ms Crawford confirmed that it was intended to run similar events in summer 2010, with the possibility of activities being extended to other months and/or sites at a later date.

Some Members queried whether improved signage for local traders and businesses would be introduced as part of the current Winchester High Street improvements. In response, Councillor Beckett confirmed that new finger post signs would be installed across the city centre. The Winchester BID were also examining the possibility of additional advertising signs promoting secondary shopping streets (such as the existing sign on the side of Lloyds bank promoting retail premises in St Thomas' Street). The Head of Economic and Cultural Services mentioned the balance required in a setting such as Winchester, between the commercial demand for signage and the continued effort to protect the integrity and attractiveness of the historic environment, which was itself part of the reason why people came to visit and shop in Winchester.

The Head of Economic and Cultural Services advised that the new Economic Strategy was in an advanced stage of preparation and a draft version had been considered by the Panel at a previous meeting. It was anticipated that the revised Strategy would be considered by Cabinet in January 2010, prior to public consultation on its contents. Councillor Beckett commented that matters regarding the low carbon economy would be fed into the preparation of the new Strategy.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the presentation be noted.

9. **OUTCOMES FOR THE COMMUNITY – OVERVIEW FOR LOCAL ECONOMY SCRUTINY PANEL**
(Report [LE75](#) refers)

The Head of Performance, Communications and Improvement introduced the Report and referred to the outcomes of the Local Area Agreement relevant to the remit of the Panel.

The Head of Economic and Cultural Services advised that, since the Report was prepared, the Museum Services Manager had joined the Winchester Community Learning Forum.

One Member suggested that it would be useful to invite representatives from the Transport Forum to a future Panel meeting. This was with particular reference to improving transport links in the early and late evenings for young people. This was agreed.

The Panel also noted that the "Wheels to Work" scheme was working with the County Council to provide mopeds (and appropriate driver training) to young people, to assist them in taking job opportunities that would otherwise not be available to them.

RESOLVED:

That the Transport Forum be invited to a future Panel meeting to discuss issues regarding young people's access to transport, as discussed above.

10. **CORPORATE BUSINESS PLAN 2010-2015 – CONSULTATION DRAFT**
(Report [CAB1922](#) refers)

During debate, the Panel concentrated on the parts of the Plan which related to Economic Prosperity.

Councillor Beckett advised that Cabinet had requested that key milestones in relation to the Silver Hill project be included in the summary of major programmes. The Panel welcomed this addition.

RESOLVED:

That no comments be made to Cabinet on the proposed wording of the Corporate Business Plan 2010-2015.

11. **GENERAL FUND BUDGET CONSULTATION 2010/11**
(Report [CAB1923](#) refers)

Councillor Beckett introduced the Report and drew the Panel's attention to the Appendices to the Report, which set out options for income growth and expenditure savings (and related prioritisations) relevant to the areas of responsibility of the Panel.

During debate, the Panel asked questions on a number of subjects (summarised below), and from the Portfolio Holders and officers responses, did not wish to highlight any concerns to Cabinet.

With regard to the potential savings listed in Appendix C of the Report relating to review of leisure centre arrangements, the Head of Economic and Cultural Services advised that a Report on the new leisure management contract would be submitted to Cabinet in December 2009.

The Panel discussed the agreed parking charges increase, together with the proposed changes to the Park and Ride service, including later operating hours in the evening. In response to some concern that increased parking prices in the town centre could have a negative impact on traders, Councillor Beckett stated that he considered any impact would be small and this should be balanced against the environmental benefits of encouraging people to use park and ride.

Some Members commented that the Culture and Economy Informal Scrutiny Group were examining the potential to expand the types of projects that could be funded under the open space scheme. The Group had been advised that Eastleigh Borough Council operated a wider scheme and it was suggested that the Council's legal officers could contact their counterparts at Eastleigh for further information.

One Member queried whether there was any potential for the Council to let any of its empty properties to be used for exercise facilities. Councillor Beckett agreed to investigate the feasibility of this suggestion, whilst noting that there were significant start-up costs for such facilities.

With regard to future plans for the Guildhall, one Member commented that in the past a private company had been interested in taking over the management. Councillor Beckett agreed to forward this comment onto the Head of Estates.

RESOLVED:

That no comments be made to Cabinet on the initial options for 2010/11 budget savings and growth.

12. **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY OUTCOME: ECONOMIC PROSPERITY – QUARTER 2 2009/10 PERFORMANCE MONITORING UPDATE (EXCEPTIONS ONLY)**
(Report [LE74](#) refers)

Councillors Stallard and Beckett drew the Panel's attention to significant items in the performance monitoring update.

During debate, the Panel asked questions on a number of subjects (summarised below) and from the Portfolio Holders' responses, did not wish to highlight any concerns to Cabinet.

With regard to the Economic Strategy, one Member suggested that the economic value of the creative sector should be highlighted within the document. The Head of Economic and Cultural Services explained that the creative sector was already named in the draft as one of the five 'core' sectors of the local economy.

In response to questions, the Head of Economic and Cultural Services advised that the Council's most valuable and significant paintings were on permanent display in the Guildhall. She confirmed that the Museums Service worked closely with the equivalent service at Southampton City Council.

The Panel congratulated the Head of Economic and Cultural Services and her team for the achievements outlined in the Report.

RESOLVED:

That the Report be noted.

12. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**
(Report [PS382](#) refers)

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Work Programme, as set out on the reverse of the agenda, and as extracted from Report PS382, be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 9.15pm.

Chairman