

THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

27 October 2014

ANNUAL REVIEW OF INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY

Contact Officer: Beth Stewart Tel No: 01962 848974
bstewart@winchester.gov.uk

RECENT REFERENCES:

OS83 - Review of Statutory Services ISG Recommendations – 23 September 2013

CAB2520 - Final report of the findings of the Informal Scrutiny Group on Statutory Services – Recommendations for Cabinet – 23 October 2013

OS84 - The Guildhall as a Commercial Venue Informal Scrutiny Group – Final Report – 23 September 2013

OS82 - The Council's Ability to Implement ISG Recommendations Informal Scrutiny Group – 28 October 2013

OS51 - Public Access to Data and Information via the Winchester City Council website ISG – 17 September 2012

PHD439 - Recommendations of the Public Access to Data and Information via the Winchester City Council website ISG – 16 October 2012

OS69 - Findings of the Informal Scrutiny on Houses in Multiple Occupation – 20 May 2013

CAB2516 - Recommendations of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the findings of the Informal Scrutiny Group on Houses in Multiple Occupation – 23 October 2013

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report provides a 12 month review of the progress against the recommendations of the Informal Scrutiny Groups listed in paragraph 1.2. It also proposes that the current system of appointing batches of Informal Scrutiny Groups each year is replaced by a rolling list of potential scrutiny group topics.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 That progress against the implementation of the recommendations of the Informal Scrutiny Groups listed in paragraph 1.2 is noted and any issues raised with the relevant Portfolio Holder.
- 2 That a rolling list of potential Informal Scrutiny Group topics is co-ordinated by the Head of Policy, replacing the current system of appointing batches each year.

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 At the September 2014 meeting of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee it was agreed that 12 month reviews of Informal Scrutiny Group (ISG) recommendations would be brought together into a single report and presented half-yearly. It is anticipated that this will support good agenda management.
- 1.2 Appendix A provides a 12 month review of progress on the recommendations of the following ISGs:
- Review of Statutory Services ISG
 - Guildhall as a Commercial Venue ISG
 - Council's Ability to Implement ISG Recommendations ISG
 - Public access to Data and Information via the Council's website ISG
 - Houses in Multiple Occupation ISG

2 Selection of Informal Scrutiny Groups

- 2.1 ISGs are currently selected in batches at the beginning of the municipal year where Members and officers are invited to suggest topics for in-depth scrutiny. These are then presented to The Overview and Scrutiny Committee who select two batches of six ISGs which the scrutiny chairs lead during the year.
- 2.2 Experience to date has been that this process can become time consuming, and lack flexibility which means that issues which are raised during the year after batches are agreed cannot be looked at in-depth in a timely manner. Due to the large number of ISGs which are appointed in these batches (up to 12 a year), there is also the risk that these include topics that are of lesser priority as the year progresses.
- 2.3 It is recommended that the Committee move instead to a system where a rolling list of ISG topics is maintained and can be added to at any point of the year. As before, all non-executive Members would be able to raise a topic for in-depth scrutiny via a Member of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Group Managers or the Head of Policy. These would be added to the list and

when an active ISG comes to a close, another ISG will be appointed from that list by the Committee. The Head of Policy will co-ordinate this list in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee and the Scrutiny Leads.

- 2.4 This has been discussed with the Chairman of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and received his support.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

3 COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND PORTFOLIO PLANS (RELEVANCE TO):

- 3.1 The scrutiny of Council services supports the key outcome in the Community Strategy of being an effective and efficient Council.

4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 4.1 There are no significant resource implications arising from this report.

5 RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 5.1 There are no significant risk management issues arising from this report.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None

APPENDICES:

Appendix A Informal Scrutiny Group recommendations and 12 month reviews.

OS109 - Appendix A

Review of Statutory Services ISG

1. That Cabinet together with the Leaders of other parties on the Council:

- i) consider potential changes to the electoral cycle to move to all-out elections every four years, having regard to a potential average annual saving of £45,000 per annum, and the appropriate timing for possible implementation

Full Council on 2/4/14 decided to retain election by thirds.

- ii) consider a significant reduction in the number of Members of Winchester City Council from 57 to say, 40, having regard to the likely savings of associated base costs of approximately £100,000 per annum plus potential for further cost savings accrued from across the organisation.

Council on 16/7/14 decided that it should propose a Council of 45 Members and the Boundary Commission is 'minded' to accept this.

2. That having regard to the high gross costs to the Council from providing a Pest Control Service, Cabinet consider the appropriateness, or otherwise, of each the following:

- i) increase the level of charges to further offset the costs to the Council from providing the service.

An increase in pest control charges came into effect on April 1st 2014, increasing rodent fees from £36 to £51. Comparing the six months April-September 2014 like for like with the previous year, income from pest control fees has increased by £6,745.

- ii) reduce the number of staff responsible for delivering the service.

Since the ISG, the number of pest control officers has been reduced from 5 to 3, with two members of the team taking advantage of early retirement opportunities. The level of demand is continually monitored and reviewed in the context of the number of staff required.

- iii) undertake a service review to look at options to reduce costs further.

Options for reducing costs further are still being explored. It is hoped that the service will utilize the 'My Council' software by the next financial year to enable members of the public to make their own on line bookings and payments and for these bookings to be automatically sent through to officer's outlook diaries. This will reduce the need for back office resources. There will be an initial set up cost offset by financial savings arising from the efficiencies generated.

The service is also proactively looking for additional commercial contract work. This includes having the Service recognised as an 'approved' contractor on the HCC list, which would enable officers to operate in Schools and on the wider HCC estate.

3. That in light of the recent legislative changes, with regard to Public Health, Cabinet be asked to review the Council's position with regard to supporting the County Council in delivering its new responsibilities.

The Head of Health and Wellbeing will take a report to The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (January 2015) about the City Council's role in Public Health.

Guildhall as a Commercial Venue ISG

1. That the Guildhall Yard Car Park be offered exclusively to users attending major events held in the Guildhall for a limited number of major events including those held at weekends.

The Guildhall car park has been utilised for some major events.

2. The arrangements entered into with parking services to enable Guildhall users to park on the top deck of the Chesil MSCP when attending conferences be continued with.

Many clients are now using this facility; it has helped attract business, especially conferences. There is an agreement with Parking that minimum numbers should be 50, however arrangements have been made for smaller groups of up to 30.

3. That the Council continues to operate the Guildhall catering service for the next three years, with a review in December 2016.

The Council continues to operate the Guildhall catering service, and continues to see a growth in catering income. The café also sees an increase in business year on year. Menus are adapted to the season, and breakfast and hot items 'ready to go' are now also offered.

4. That the Guildhall operate its own banqueting offer alongside that of external catering contractors and that the outside catering contract is re-tendered for a further period of three years to expire in June 2017, with an option to extend for a further year.

The Guildhall is operating its own banqueting offer, and continues to see a growing income from this. For the second year in a row we have catered for the Winchester Business Excellence Awards. The tender process has recently been completed.

5. That tenders be sought by the Head of Estates to secure a range of additional banquet caterers to complement the in-house catering team and to ensure that a varied range of quality and pricing structures are available to serve the banquet catering needs of Guildhall customers.

The catering tender has been completed. The Guildhall now offers a range of 6 caterers which complement the in-house catering team. The Contracts are valid from the 1st October 2014.

6. That the Guildhall be allowed to erect temporary banners outside the building on the day of or during the week of events to advertise events and to make internal arrangements for more flexible use of Council display boards for advertising upcoming events.

Guildhall clients may place banners outside the building on the day of their event. The Parking team has loaned the use of a large display panel in Chesil Street Car Park which has proved successful for advertising large events.

7. That an ISG be established to examine the potential for increased use of Abbey House (whilst retaining it as a Council and Mayoral asset).

This is underway.

8. That the refurbishment of the Wintonian Room and Bar is considered and that its use as a public bar at lunchtimes is investigated;

The bar is scheduled to be refurbished early next year and we are continuing to look at the feasibility of opening it as a public bar. However currently it is being utilised far more as an event space in line with the business plan for the venue.

9. That the commercial potential of the Guildhall can be further developed by pursuing the future development opportunities identified in paragraph 3.24

The commercial potential of the Guildhall has been developed; in July the Guildhall hosted its first live performance – an adaption of Romeo and Juliet by Discarded Nut Youth Theatre. A Cabaret Night in November is proving to be a great success, with ticket sales currently at 200 people. This avenue is still being pursued; however concentration is also on large medical conferences as these command high revenues. By the end of the year we will have achieved three full building Medical Conference hires.

Council's Ability to Implement ISG Recommendations ISG

Selection of topics

1. 'Overview' and 'scrutiny' should be complementary. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee should take a more strategic approach to its work and selection of topics for consideration by an ISG should reflect this more strategic approach.
2. That before suggesting topics, Members should be encouraged carefully to consider Change Plans, Portfolio Holder Plans and up-to-date key data about the Council's Performance, which need to be available and accessible on the Council's website. All suggested topics for an ISG should have a relatively narrow focus.
3. That when selecting the number of ISG topics for each year, The Overview and Scrutiny Committee gives consideration to the resource implications in light of continued resource constraints and likely number of meetings.
4. To assist The Overview and Scrutiny Committee in setting up an ISG, a supporting document should be prepared by the relevant member or officer that sets out the purpose and likely resource needs of the proposed ISG. This will contribute to making best possible use of Members' and Officers' time.

Since the recommendations of this ISG were agreed, a further batch of ISG has not been agreed. Paragraph 2 of this report sets out a new recommended way forward for selecting scrutiny topics and if agreed these recommendations will be applied to future ISG topic suggestions.

Size of an ISG, number of meetings and involvement of Portfolio Holders

5. The usual number of Members serving on an ISG should be five or six.
6. Unless exceptional circumstances prevail, an ISG which is correctly defined at the outset and remains focussed, should be able to conclude its business by holding not more than 4 or 5 meetings.
7. That discussion with the relevant Portfolio Holder about the financial and other relevant implications of an ISGs work should take place early in the deliberations of any new ISG, as well as at the time when recommendations are being finalised.

Recommendations and follow up

8. The ISG recommendations should be relatively few in number (usually the fewer the better) and the likely timescale of implementation and any resource implications (including officer time) should be detailed against each recommendation.
9. Scrutiny Chairs should be expected to champion an ISGs recommendations to try to ensure full implementation.

Recommendations 5 – 9 tend to be the convention for ISGs, except when Members feel that membership should be extended (for example the Guildhall ISG) or an ISG should run for longer than 5 meetings (for example the RPLC ISG). Members and ISG lead officers will be reminded of these recommendations at the start of any new ISGs.

10. In addition to the current review of progress on implementing ISG recommendations after a one-year period, a further short report on the extent to which recommendations of an ISG report have been implemented should be brought to O&S two to two-and-a-half years after the first consideration of the report which should then, if necessary, raise any outstanding concerns with Cabinet.

It was agreed at the September meeting of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee that an exception report would be submitted once a year setting out progress against recommendations for all ISGs due for an annual review. To keep officer time spent on producing reports at a minimum, it is suggested that when this annual report is discussed, where recommendations are outstanding, Members flag any that where there is a particular concern and an oral update is received by Committee the following year as to progress on completing that action.

Other ways that members can raise major issues

11. The Chief Operating Officer should remind all elected Members of their right to put items on Council agendas under the Council Procedure Rule 36.

Members were reminded of this at the training session on “The Role of the Backbencher” held on 2 July 2014. However as not all Members attended an item to this effect has been included in the Democratic Services Update.

Public access to Data and Information via the Council's website ISG

1. Website

The website should be seen as the primary point of contact for our 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.

The website is the primary point of contact for the Council's residents, with an average of 65,000-70,000 visits per month. All departments participate and many improvements have been made to the site since 2012 in terms of content and interactivity. The website and attached pdfs reduce the need for printed documents and maximise savings.

2. 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.

The functionality of the planning portal is good, enabling users to choose different routes to access information. It is part of the Communications Work Plan to review the Planning Portal; however the extent to which the content can be simplified is limited by the nature and complexity of planning information. It also requires the involvement of the Planning team, who are currently under considerable pressure.

3. 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.

The Licensing section of the website is currently clear and well-used and the Licensing team have not reported any issues with it. A potential upgrade to the website will be explored in November and at this point a Licensing Portal could be added.

4. 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.

The Council recognises the importance and potential of social media and makes effective use of it in increasing access and gathering feedback. The Council's Twitter site now has more than 7,300 followers and its Facebook site nearly 1,000 'likes'. These are used daily to enable the Council to actively connect and communicate with a wide and growing audience. The Council has also developed social media presence in areas such as YouTube, Flickr, LinkedIn, Pinterest and Google+.

5. 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.

Regular improvements are made to the A-Z and search functions in the light of customer and staff feedback and analytics.

6. 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.

Google maps has been used to develop user-friendly interfaces for key information including car parks, play sites, community venues and recycling facilities.

7. 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.

The Council now publishes information relating to a number of key areas of performance on the website with regular updates to the data. The information is presented both graphically as an interactive chart and a data table along with a brief narrative. The data can be downloaded in three different formats including MS Excel spreadsheet, CSV and PDF files making it accessible to a variety of users.

8. Reporting

Identify the most useful statistical information to create monthly custom reports for the eCommunications 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.

Statistical information is generated monthly and weekly and is reported through Covalent and the e-newsletter City Voice. Analysis of this and other information helps to shape continued development of the site. Departments receive monthly reports. We are awaiting verification on our Twitter account which will provide us with more in-depth reporting.

9. 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.

The site is edited regularly to ensure that quality of content takes precedence over quantity. Departments receive monthly reports and the Communications team works with them to improve their content and their service to users.

10. eForms

Optimise existing eForms; streamlining and removing unnecessary fields. All personal fields will be moved to the final page before submission to increase completion rates.

The eCommunications Team will work with Web Officers to identify where additional eForms would be beneficial. A review of response times to forms coming through the website should be undertaken.

Existing eForms have been optimised as far as possible with the current software. An upgrade to the website will be explored in November, providing the opportunity to invest in software that is more straightforward and intuitive. Additional e-forms are produced where the need is identified. Response times depend on the purpose of the e-form, with departments regulating their own response times where necessary. An upgraded software package would enable response times to be built into the functionality.

11. That the Portfolio Holder be asked to report back to the next meeting on Cabinet's consideration of the above recommendations and report back again in 12 months on their implementation.

Houses in Multiple Occupation ISG

1. That the Assistant Director (High Quality Environment) commence a one year pilot of the Enhanced Neighbourhood Management approach in localities with a significant number of Houses in Multiple Occupation; the pilot to commence on 1st July 2013.

A partnership has been formed between social and private landlords and the Environment and Streetcare teams. New activities include visual audits of neighbourhoods with Ward Members. The aim is to create a more holistic approach to neighbourhood management.

Since the ISG, further work has been done concerning HMOs. As part of the Local Plan Part 2, the Council will designate an Article 4 Direction to help control any increase in the concentration of HMOs in an area. This would initially only apply to Stanmore, but have the potential to be extended to other areas. This will improve availability of affordable family housing as well as reducing community tensions often present in areas with high concentrations of HMOs.

2. That officers work in partnership with the University to support students to set up a means of recording and publicising feedback on the quality of private rented accommodation and the service offered by landlords.

The Council operates a voluntary accreditation scheme aimed primarily at shared student HMOs. This sets down a bench mark property standard that all houses must achieve in respect of fire precautions, repair, decorative condition and amenities etc. Additionally, accreditation imposes a requirement on landlords to undertake certain functions in order to ensure their properties are well and effectively managed. All student HMOs advertised through The University of Winchester's accommodation office, in order to have acquired accreditation status, will have been inspected by the Council's Private Sector housing team.

With increasing usage of social media, on-line chat rooms and forums, plus dedicated accommodation web sites such as Spareroom.co.uk / EasyRoommate and houseshare.co.uk, information regarding the quality of private rented accommodation and the service offered by landlords can be much more easily disseminated and viewed by potential tenants. This enables tenants to make more informed decisions regarding accommodation they might consider renting. Therefore it is not considered that an additional forum is needed over and above what already exists.

3. That officers extend the coverage achieved by the 'Welcome to the Neighbourhood' booklet.

This has been extended to cover Winnall as well as Stanmore, to target both Winchester University and Winchester School of Art students.

4. That the Council commission an update of its 2007 Private Sector Stock Condition Survey and revise its Private Sector Housing Strategy.

The Council has commissioned David Adamson and Partners to undertake a Private Sector Housing Stock Condition Survey which commenced at the end of September and should be completed by December. It is expected that the full survey report will be published in March 2015.

5. That officers work in partnership with the University of Winchester and University of Southampton to find ways to foster effective community cohesion between students and their neighbourhoods.

Work in this area includes: joint stalls with the police at fresher's fairs, 'welcome to the neighbourhood' booklets, joint response to noise complaints with the University, Environment and Neighbourhood service team and work to encourage recycling and awareness of bin collection days. The Love Stanmore and Love Where You Live campaigns have involved student volunteers in litter picks and community events.