

THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 September 2015

Attendance:

Councillors:

Simon Cook (Chairman) (P)

J Berry (P)
Gemmell (P)
Hiscock (P)
Humby (P)
Sanders (P)

Stallard (P)
Tod
Thacker (P)
Wright (P)

Deputy Members

Councillor Thompson (Standing Deputy for Councillor Tod)

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillors Godfrey (Leader), Byrnes (Portfolio Holder for Local Economy), Horrill (Portfolio Holder for Housing Services), Miller (Portfolio Holder for Estates), Gottlieb and Laming

1. **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

Councillors Humby and Stallard declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in respect of agenda items due to their role as a County Councillors. However, as there was no material conflict of interest, they remained in the room, spoke and voted under the dispensation granted on behalf of the Standards Committee to participate and vote on all matters which might have a County Council involvement.

Councillor J Berry declared a personal interest in Item 5, due to her role as a member of WinACC.

2. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman made the following announcements:

- (i) The Chairman congratulated the Housing Options Team on their success in attaining the nationally awarded accredited silver award for its achievements in Housing Standards; and
- (ii) The Chairman announced that, following the resignation of Councillor Chris Pines as Chairman in February, he had been undertaking an ongoing study into Scrutiny arrangements at other Local Authorities. It was noted the comparisons carried out with Authorities to date had highlighted various scrutiny procedure alternatives which would warrant further investigation upon completion of the study. It would provide options that may offer improvements to those currently operated at Winchester. The Chairman reported that a full report on this matter would be provided to the Committee in due course.

3. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of meeting held on 7 July 2015 and the minutes of the special meeting held on 13 July 2015, less exempt minute, be approved and adopted.

4. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr Beveridge, representing WinACC, addressed the Committee in relation to Item 5 (Casson Block Enhancement Scheme), Ms Back, Chief Executive of Sports, Art and Leisure Trust (SALT) and Councillor Laming addressed the Committee in relation to Item 6 (Options for River Park Leisure Centre) and Councillor Gottlieb addressed the Committee in relation to Item 14 (St Clement's Surgery – exempt report). A summary of their representations are detailed under the relevant Item below.

5. **CASSON BLOCK, ST GEORGES STREET, FORECOURT/FRONTAGE ENHANCEMENT SCHEME**

(Report CAB2712 refers)

Councillor Byrnes introduced the report and provided an overview of the enhancements to the appearance of the Casson Block and its forecourt in St George's Street, to integrate this area with the rest of the Town Centre. This would also provide linkage to the new developments at Silver Hill and Station Approach. The upgrade to shop frontages and the general design of the forecourt would contribute to enhancing the appearance, cleanliness and general appeal to this particular area.

It was reported that preliminary designs were being drawn up which would form the basis of a consultation exercise, expected in the Autumn with works envisaged to commence during 2016.

Councillor Byrnes made reference the urgent need for the regeneration of the Casson Block, where businesses were struggling with the reduced levels in footfall and stated that there would be significant economic benefits to improving this area of the Town.

The Committee were provided with a breakdown of the capital budget virement for the works that had been considered and approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 9 September.

Several Members made reference to the funding provision, which they stated needed to be used to tackle traffic flow and congestion and reduce carbon emissions in this area, rather than for the scheme now proposed.

In response to questions, Councillor Godfrey addressed these concerns and commented that funding for general improvements to traffic flow had not been removed from the access plan, but rather that the proposed works as outlined in the Report, were complementary to the implementation of the access plan for when Hampshire County Council (HCC) Highways were in a position to address these traffic issues in the Town Centre. This would be carried out as part of the finalisation of the works to Silver Hill and Station Approach, to ensure that all areas surrounding these major developments would link and flow adequately as a whole.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr Beveridge, representing WinACC, addressed the Committee and answered Members' questions thereon.

In summary, Mr Beveridge stated that WinACC objected to the proposed virement from the access plan to the Casson Block project, as set out in the Report. He considered that improvements to traffic management and air quality in this area would enhance the streetscene which, in turn would increase footfall and profitability for businesses in Casson Block and funding should be directed in this manner towards schemes waiting since 2007 to improve the ambience in this area of the Town.

At the conclusion of public participation, the Chairman thanked Mr Beveridge for his comments.

During debate, several Members commented that they would like the opportunity to view the comments and opinions of local businesses and interested parties, following from the forthcoming consultation process.

RESOLVED:

That the decision of Cabinet to approve a capital budget virement (of £150,000 from the Winchester Town Access Plan Capital Budget, as detailed in paragraph 3.2 of the report, be not called in for review).

6. OPTIONS FOR RIVER PARK LEISURE CENTRE

(Report CAB 2708 refers)

Councillor Godfrey introduced the Report and advised that Cabinet had previously considered a Report on the outline design for possible leisure facilities in the Winchester area, with five possible options taken forward. RPT Consulting were appointed to assess the financial viability of these five options and following consideration of their report received in July, work has been undertaken to review the key elements of their findings. It was not possible to publish the evaluation at the current time as it contained information regarding the expected contributions of external partners and discussions with them were on-going. However, the evaluation would be made public as soon as possible. The outcome of the viability assessment has outlined that, of the five options available, two of these options were considered to be financially viable, as follows:

- (i) Option 2 - a more extensive upgrade of the existing RPLC facility which would improve some facilities and give a life expectancy of up to 15 years; and
- (ii) Option 5 – new building at the Bar End site on the ‘back site’ i.e. area currently occupied by the play area, artificial turf pitch, land owned by HCC and a small part of the Council’s King George V Playing Field and utilising an access through the existing depot site.

The Council’s preferred option was Option 5, which would be investigated further with Option 2 as a fallback. It was reported that Cabinet had made the decision, at its meeting on 9 September 2015, to move forward with a Business Case and more detailed design study for Option 5, to then commence the consultation process with residents of Highcliffe and Hyde and also to gain support with key stakeholders.

Councillor Godfrey reported that the Council are keen to see Garrison Ground remaining as playing fields for the foreseeable future.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms Back, Chief Executive of SALT and Councillor Laming addressed the Committee and answered Members’ questions thereon.

In summary, Ms Back stated that SALT welcomed the focus on the Bar End site and the partnership working with RPT Consulting, with SALT involved in the process to date. She suggested that it would be advantageous for all partners to meet to consider how best to use the Bar End site and consider the release the former Depot land for this purpose, giving consideration to accessibility for everyone. She stated that she was disappointed to see only a small part of the land in the proposals to Cabinet and wished to ensure that whole of the Bar End site was discussed going forward. Due the current confidential nature of the RPT report capital cost estimates had not yet been made available. However, Ms

Back stated that SALT had carried out a capital cost estimate, based on research that had been undertaken, which had highlighted a significant reduction to the proposed costs previously outlined by the Council. In response to this matter, the Corporate Director stated that he would be happy to view these costs from Ms Back in due course.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Laming addressed the Committee and answered Members' questions thereon.

In summary, Councillor Laming stated that following the cost spent on a further consultant's report, he wished to know long the timetable would take to develop these leisure facilities and was concerned at a lack of speed. The former Depot site should be available for commercial development as the revenue was needed. He made reference to the option for refurbishment of the present site and questioned whether there were plans to ensure some external facilities still remain available for community use at River Park.

In response to the questions raised during public participation, Councillor Godfrey reiterated that the Council remain committed to developing its work with partners over the coming months to assess what will work, what is affordable and to ensure consultation is thoroughly carried out as an important part of the process.

At the conclusion of public participation, the Chairman thanked Ms Back and Councillor Laming for their comments.

During discussion the Committee sought clarification on a number of points. These included: an open and transparent consultation process and involvement of Ward Members for Highcliffe and Hyde prior to consulting with residents; site options for a 'green centre'; residual facilities remaining at RPLC i.e. football pitches and the length of time for decisions to be taken on the development of the Bar End site as the preferred option.

RESOLVED:

1. That the comments The Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted, as set out above.
2. That the Committee raise no comments to Council on the options for River Park Leisure Centre, as set out in CAB2708 at this stage of the process, but the matter be considered further by the Committee when the outcome of the public consultation process is available.

7. **MAGDALEN HILL CEMETERY EXTENSION**

(Report CAB2714 refers)

The Committee noted that Report CAB2714 had not been made available for publication within the statutory deadline. The Chairman agreed to accept the item onto the agenda as a matter requiring urgent consideration.

The Head of Landscapes and Open Spaces outlined the report and advised that, with the capacity for burial plots due to run out at Magdalen Hill Cemetery during the Summer of 2016, a planning application had previously been granted to extend into the neighbouring land owned by the City Council to create an additional 5,800 spaces. This would extend the use of the Cemetery for a further 30 to 40 years.

The Committee noted that the previous Report (WTF222) had been considered with estimated costs provided prior to the tendering of works being completed. Since the current report (CAB2714) was prepared there had been a further adjustment to recommendation 2, so that a supplementary estimate of £105,000 was now required. Cabinet had approved the revised expenditure at its meeting held on 9 September 2015, subject to comments from the Winchester Town Forum at their meeting on 23 September 2015.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee endorse the decision taken by Cabinet, as set out above, subject to any comments from the Winchester Town Forum at its meeting on 23 September 2015, and the matter be not called-in for review.

8. **CAPITAL STRATEGY 2015**

(Report CAB2710 refers)

The Committee noted that Cabinet had recommended that Council approve the draft Capital Strategy 2015, as set out in the Report.

Councillors Godfrey introduced the Report which looked at meeting the demands of the Community Strategy and included key objectives to monitor and improve the local economy. It also included current issues relating to the Housing Revenue Account and the importance of the Asset Management Plan.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the Capital Strategy 2015

RECOMMENDED:

THAT THE DRAFT CAPITAL STRATEGY 2015, AS SET OUT IN APPENDIX A OF CAB2710, BE SUPPORTED.

9. **DEVOLUTION: UPDATE ON THE HAMPSHIRE & ISLE OF WIGHT SUBMISSION TO GOVERNMENT**
(Report CAB2715 refers)

Councillor Godfrey introduced the report which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 9 September 2015, and outlined the continued discussions that had taken place across Hampshire, Southampton, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight. The Committee were reminded of the delegated authority provided for the Leader and Chief Executive to work with other local authorities to develop a model for devolution to meet the Council's needs, as well as the aims of Government.

Councillor Godfrey reported that the prospectus had been sent to the Chancellor on 4 September and that this contained detailed concepts, which are for further discussion with Government, with the Councils to retain all business rates with the grants received from the Government becoming dependant on individual Council's own business successes in the acquisition of funding for our services. He drew Members' attention to the proposals surrounding Housing numbers, the productivity of the HIOWLA area and the need to produce greater skilled labour and profitable businesses to improve current productivity levels for future growth.

A Member raised concerns that the proposed governance arrangements needed to ensure that the interests of the smaller Districts are protected so that the larger authorities did not dominate decision making.

Councillor Godfrey informed the Committee that the governance arrangements were likely to involve a combined authority with all areas being represented. There would be safeguards so that decisions were made at a local level as far as possible and Districts would retain control of their Local Plans. Progress was being made on the proposals. However, there was still a long way to go from anything being agreed at this stage but that he would continue to provide regular updates on the latest position. The final decision would be made by full Council.

RECOMMENDED:-

THAT THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE NOTE THE PROGRESS MADE AND MAKE NO FURTHER COMMENT UPON THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH GOVERNMENT.

10. **COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY THE COUNCIL**

(Report OS130 refers)

Councillor Horrill outlined the reasons for the increased level of Housing complaints, as set out in the Report. With 5,000 tenancies and 20,000 repairs carried out in any given year, it was noted that, by comparison, the level of complaints received versus the overall number of tenants using services indicated that figures were relative and reflected a positive level of satisfaction across the Housing service overall.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Report be received and noted;

2. That officers investigate whether it is possible to acquire statistical comparisons from other Local Authorities on the level of complaints received for various services; and

3. That officers be congratulated on the levels of customer satisfaction received across the Council.

11. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND OCTOBER 2015 FORWARD PLAN**

(Report OS125 refers)

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Work Programme and Forward Plan for October 2015, be noted.

12. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

RESOLVED:

1. That in all the circumstances, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

2. That the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business because it is likely that, if members of the public were present, there would be disclosure to them of

