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THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 8 September 2025

Attendance:

Councillors
Brook (Chairperson)

Wallace
Batho
Laming
Pett

Clear
Power
Murphy
Bolton

Other members in attendance:

Councillors Lee, Cutler, Porter, Reach and Tod

[Video recording of this meeting](#)

1. **APOLOGIES AND DEPUTY MEMBERS**

No apologies for the meeting were received.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

The following declarations were made:

- a) Councillor Wallace declared a disclosable pecuniary interest due to his role as a Hampshire County Councillor. However, as there was no material conflict of interest, he remained in the room and spoke under the dispensation granted by the Audit and Governance committee.
- b) Councillor Pett declared a disclosable pecuniary interest due to his role as a member of the South Downs National Park Authority. However, as there was no material conflict of interest, he remained in the room and spoke under the dispensation granted by the Monitoring Officer.
- c) Councillor Batho and Councillor Pett declared an Other Registerable Interest as they were both Non-Executive Directors of Venta Living.

3. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairperson acknowledged receipt of recent correspondence from a member of the public regarding the Cornerhouse property which had been discussed at two previous meetings of the Committee. Following consultation with Councillor Wallace and a review of the circulated communications, both were satisfied that the matter had been appropriately addressed and concluded.

4. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE 5 JUNE 2025**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 June 2025 be approved and adopted.

5. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Councillor Danny Lee addressed the committee regarding items: 9 - Q1 Finance & Performance Monitoring and item 10 – Work Request from a Committee member: The Planning Enforcement Service and a summary of his contributions were captured within that agenda item.

6. **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT OUTTURN 2024/2025**

Councillor Mark Reach, Cabinet Member for Good Homes, introduced the report, Housing Revenue Account Outturn 2024/2025, the introduction included the following points:

1. The report would be considered by Cabinet on 10 September 2025.
2. It outlined the financial performance of the HRA and the capital programme in 2024-25.
3. Approval was sought for a revised budget forecast for the 2025-26 HRA capital programme as set out in detail within the report.

The committee was recommended to scrutinise and comment on the proposals within the attached draft cabinet report, ref CAB3516, which was to be considered by cabinet at its meeting on 10 September 2025. The committee proceeded to ask questions and debate the report. In summary, the following matters were raised.

1. Clarification was sought regarding the catering provision at Chesil Lodge and whether full cost recovery had been achieved or was planned.
2. Confirmation was requested that the £300,000 received from the sale of nutrient credits would be used for upgrading wastewater treatment plants.
3. A question was raised about the possibility of using PfSH funding to accelerate the upgrade of wastewater treatment works.
4. An explanation was sought for why it appeared that only part of a £9.8 million slippage was being moved forward in the budget.
5. Questions were asked about the progress toward achieving 100% of housing stock at EPC C by 2030, including the previous year's level and whether the council was on track to meet the target.
6. An update was requested on the application to the Local Authority Housing Fund, as the report referenced decisions made in July 2025.
7. Clarification was sought on the procurement of the Swedish cottages contract.

These points were responded to by Councillor Mark Reach, Cabinet Member for Good Homes, and Simon Hendey, Strategic Director, accordingly.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That cabinet considers the committee's comments raised during the discussion of the item.

7. **GENERAL FUND OUTTURN 2024/2025**

Councillor Neil Cutler, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation introduced the report, General Fund Outturn 2024/2025 ref CAB3514, which provided a summary of the statement of accounts for the General Fund and Capital Programme outturn for 2024/2025. The introduction included the following points.

1. The report detailed the variances from the budget across service areas, which showed a positive outturn of £2.4 million.
2. This surplus had allowed for a transfer of just over £1.7 million to reserves and £0.7 million to the General Fund reserve.
3. As a result of these transfers and additional in-year funding, a revision of the capital programme, including new budgets, was necessary.
4. The report also sought approval for the write-off of five uncollectible non-domestic rates debts, with details provided in an exempt appendix.

The committee was asked to scrutinise and comment on the proposals within the attached draft cabinet report, ref CAB3514, which was to be considered by cabinet at its meeting on 10 September 2025. The committee proceeded to ask questions and debate the report. In summary, the following matters were raised.

1. A question was asked regarding the likelihood of the council receiving a multi-year government settlement.
2. A question was asked whether funds from the original budget that were transferred to reserves were ringfenced for their original purpose or could be moved to a general reserve.
3. A query was raised as to whether the favourable variance in car parking receipts indicated that the success of the revised parking strategy had been underestimated.
4. A question was asked about how the council's write-off of non-domestic rates compared with other similar councils.
5. Further details were requested regarding the purpose and use of the Asylum Dispersal grant.
6. A question was raised on how the spending of the £13.4m in Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds could be accelerated and the allocation of interest.
7. Clarification was sought regarding who would have decision-making responsibilities for CIL funds following Local Government Reorganisation.

These points were responded to by Councillor Neil Cutler, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation, Councillor Jackie Porter, Cabinet Member for Place and Local Plan, Liz Keys, Director (Finance), Simon Hendey, Strategic Director, and Laura Taylor, Chief Executive, accordingly.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance consider the allocation of interest earned from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds, with the outcome to be shared with the committee.
3. That the Cabinet Member for Place and Local Plan consider a member discussion with the aim of encouraging applications and schemes for future CIL funding.
4. That cabinet considers the committee's comments raised during the discussion of the item.

8. GENERAL FUND OUTTURN 2024/2025 EXEMPT APPENDIX 7

The committee agreed that it did not need to move into an exempt session to consider the exempt appendix.

9. Q1 FINANCE & PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Councillor Neil Cutler, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation, introduced the report, ref CAB3513, Q1 Finance & Performance Monitoring. The introduction included the following points.

1. The report was the first performance report of the 2025/26 financial year, covering the period from 1 April to 30 June 2025.
2. The report focused on the progress and achievements made against the priorities of the new Council Plan.
3. As requested by the committee the report format was the inclusion of historical trends for the Red, Amber, and Green status of projects and performance reports to provide better context.
4. Several performance highlights were noted, including:
 - a. The council was named the best District Council nationally for tackling climate change.
 - b. The commencement of the food waste collection rollout in partnership with BIFFA.
 - c. The start of construction for the new sports pavilion at River Park.
 - d. The delivery of a green business support programme.
 - e. The achievement of gold accreditation from the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance.

Councillor Danny Lee addressed the committee to highlight perceived gaps in the council's performance reporting. He proposed the introduction of an integrated Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for estate assets, greening, and climate resilience to cover pollinator-friendly planting, water efficiency,

community biodiversity, and embodied carbon reporting. He asked the committee to recommend this to the Cabinet as a significant item for consideration.

Councillor Lee also requested that the committee identify areas requiring additional resources to accelerate the delivery of the Council Plan, suggesting that positive financial outturns could be used for this purpose. His suggestions included a number of matters, including improving carbon savings attribution, developing an overarching master plan for major regeneration projects to reduce risk, and addressing workforce capacity issues in housing compliance and maintenance.

In response, Councillor Neil Cutler, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation, stated that the positive financial outturns were partly a result of project delays caused by a lack of available skills, and not a lack of funds.

The committee was asked to raise with the Deputy Leader or relevant Cabinet member any issues arising from the information in this report, ref CAB3513, which was being presented to Cabinet on 10 September 2025, and consider whether there are any items of significance to resolve or to be drawn to the attention of Cabinet.

The committee proceeded to ask questions and debate the report. In summary, the following matters were raised.

1. It was reiterated that the basis of KPI targets would be included in the report.
2. It was felt that there were inconsistencies between the carbon emissions targets on page 85 and the figures presented at an earlier Carbon Neutrality Open Forum. Clarification was sought regarding this and other perceived inconsistencies in environmental data when compared with figures from the previous quarter. provided.
3. An explanation was sought for the decrease in the number of cleared fly-tips, while the clear-up rate had also slowed.
4. A question was asked regarding the South Downs National Park monitoring charge Clarification was requested on the increased visitor target for the Sport and Leisure centre on page 90, and what, if any, additional revenue this generated for the council.
5. Further information was sought on the progress and trends identified from the annual staff travel survey referenced on page 78.
6. Details were requested regarding the "Staff Heat scheme" mentioned on page 79.
7. A question was raised about ensuring a joined-up approach between the council's regeneration work to develop a comprehensive bus strategy for the city.

8. An explanation was requested for the 'red' status of open damp and mould cases and outstanding high-risk fire assessments on page 107, and what plan was in place to address these issues.
9. It was felt that there was a numerical discrepancy in the data for homes achieving an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C or above on page 105, and whether the current trajectory for improving homes to an EPC rating of C would achieve the 2030 target.
10. A question was asked about the TC25 programme and whether 100% of the TC25 savings target would be achieved within the original timeframe.

These points were responded to by Councillor Neil Cutler, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation, Councillor Martin Tod, Leader and Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Councillor Mark Reach, Cabinet Member for Good Homes Laura Taylor, Chief Executive, Simon Hendey, Strategic Director, Liz Keys, Director (Finance), and Simon Howson, Senior Policy and Programme Manager accordingly.

RESOLVED:

1. The committee noted the report and agreed on the following comments and recommendations for Cabinet consideration:
 - a. That the fly-tipping performance to be reviewed, with a particular focus on the reasons for the change in clear-up rate.
 - b. That an update on the trends from the annual staff travel survey be provided to all members
 - c. That further information regarding the "Staff Heat scheme" be provided to all members.
 - d. That the programme of works to achieve an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C for all council homes by 2030 be provided
 - e. That Cabinet considers the development of an integrated Key Performance Indicator (KPI) relating to climate change and the allocation of additional resources to accelerate the delivery of Council Plan priorities.

10. **WORK REQUEST FROM A COMMITTEE MEMBER: THE PLANNING ENFORCEMENT SERVICE**

Councillor Brian Laming introduced the work programme request. He endorsed the proposal to form a Task and Finish Group to review operations, assess strengths and weaknesses, and compare performance with other councils.

Councillor Jackie Porter, Cabinet Member for Place and Local Plan provided a further introduction which included the following points:

1. The review was welcomed as an opportunity to reassure councillors that the council was performing well in enforcement, while also learning from the practices of other local authorities.

2. It was acknowledged that while not all information could be shared publicly, improving communication with Ward councillors on the status of enforcement issues was important.
3. The review offered a chance to ensure councillors were familiar with the updated processes under the Enforcement 2025 policy.
4. It was noted that the council did not have an unlimited budget, and it was not always expedient to pursue every case, but it was essential to be clear about the rationale for enforcement action to ensure successful outcomes for the public.
5. The request was seen as a positive step towards improving transparency and public access to information regarding enforcement outcomes.

Councillor Danny Lee addressed the committee to support the request. He stated that the current planning enforcement process was protracted, which caused community stress, environmental harm, and damaged public trust in the council. He noted that the existing powers under the Town and Country Planning Act were weak and that the government had no immediate plans to reform the system, necessitating local solutions. While praising the professionalism of council officers, he attributed the problems to the system within which they had to operate.

He suggested that the Task and Finish Group should consider several key issues, including cumbersome evidential standards, inconsistent police support for site visits, and a lack of role clarity between Winchester City Council and the South Downs National Park. He proposed actions such as using drones for site validation, making stronger use of legal notices, and establishing clearer protocols with the police for support. He also recommended that the group review the enforcement plan, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and the need for enhanced training and IT tools for the team, ensuring any new proposals were future-proofed against upcoming legislation.

The committee was asked to consider the request and if supported to establish a time-limited Task & Finish Group to conduct a focused review of Winchester City Council's Planning Enforcement Service as set out.

The committee proceeded to ask questions and debate the report. In summary, the following matters were raised.

1. A question was asked if the Leader could be requested to lobby the local Member of Parliament to take forward the need for stronger national planning enforcement legislation.
2. Clarification was sought regarding the different information formats for South Downs National Park and Winchester City Council cases, with a request to consider a commonality of presentation.

These points were responded to by Councillor Jackie Porter, Cabinet Member for Place and Local Plan and Councillor Martin Tod, Leader and Cabinet Member for Regeneration accordingly.

RESOLVED:

1. That a time-limited Task and Finish Group be established to conduct a focused review of the Planning Enforcement Service as set out in the report.
2. That Councillors Brook, Laming, Murphy, and Wallace be appointed as members of the Task and Finish Group and joined by Councillor Porter as the relevant Cabinet Member.
3. That the Leader of the Council be requested to lobby local Members of Parliament on the need to strengthen national planning enforcement legislation.

11. **TO NOTE THE COMMITTEES CURRENT WORK PROGRAMME.**

The Chairperson advised that the three Committee Chairs were meeting regularly to review and co-ordinate their respective workplans.

RESOLVED:

That the latest version of the work programme (which can be found here <https://democracy.winchester.gov.uk/mgPlansHome.aspx?bcr=1>) be noted.

12. **TO NOTE THE LATEST FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS**

RESOLVED

That the latest Forward Plan of Key Decisions be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 8.15 pm

Chairperson