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THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 26 May 2026

Attendance:

Councillors
Wallace (Chairperson)

Horrill	Batho
Pett	Clear
Power	Gordon-Smith
Murphy	

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Laming

Deputy Members:

Councillor V Achwal

Other members in attendance:

Councillors Lee, Cramoysan, Cutler and Tod

Video recording of this meeting

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1. **APOLOGIES AND DEPUTY MEMBERS**

Apologies for the meeting were noted as above.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

Councillor Batho and Councillor Clear declared a disclosable pecuniary interest due to their roles as Hampshire County Councillors. However, as there was no material conflict of interest, they remained in the room and spoke under the dispensation granted by the Monitoring Officer.

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.

3. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRPERSON FOR MUNICIPAL YEAR 2026/27.**

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Horrill be appointed Vice-Chairperson for the 2026/27 municipal year.

4. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

No announcements were made.

5. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE 17 MARCH 2026**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on the 17 March 2026 be approved and adopted.

Note. Councillor Pett asked if officers could follow up on the actions agreed at the meeting of the committee on the 4th March 2026 regarding the Community Safety Update.

6. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Councillor Danny Lee addressed the committee regarding items: Central Winchester Regeneration (CWR) - Proposed Land Acquisition, Bar End Depot Disposal and Q4 Finance and Performance Monitoring 25/26. A summary of his contributions were captured within the agenda items below.

7. **CENTRAL WINCHESTER REGENERATION (CWR) - PROPOSED LAND ACQUISITION**

Councillor Martin Tod, Leader and Cabinet Member for Regeneration introduced the report, ref CAB3556 which set out proposals for the Central Winchester Regeneration (CWR) - Proposed Land Acquisition. The introduction included the following points.

1. The Central Winchester Regeneration remained a significant opportunity for the city to provide new homes, businesses, and public spaces.
2. The St Clements surgery site was not included in the original development agreement, and while not essential for current plans, its acquisition would prevent a dilapidated building from remaining in the centre of the new development.
3. Acquiring the site would remove barriers to free movement, expand design and development options for surrounding areas, and resolve protected rights to light and access.
4. The acquisition would strengthen the value of the council's existing landholdings through “marriage value.”
5. A put option was outlined in paragraph 2.3 of the report, which committed Igloo to purchasing the site, thereby providing financial protection for the council.

Councillor Danny Lee addressed the committee. He raised concerns regarding whether the acquisition de-risked the wider scheme or shifted financial risk onto the council. He questioned the robustness of the option agreement with Jigsaw, the downside risk if the put option was not exercised, and the potential exposure to long-term debt. He raised several further points regarding the realistic deliverability of meanwhile uses for the building, and whether Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) could complicate future governance and liabilities.

The committee was asked to comment on the proposals within the attached cabinet report, ref CAB3556, which was to be considered by cabinet at its meeting on 28 May 2026.

The Chairperson advised that the Committee's role was to test whether the specific proposal was sound and proportionate, and not to revisit the overall regeneration strategy. The Chair asked Members to focus scrutiny on three key areas to provide constructive input to Cabinet: Strategic Case, Financial Exposure and Delivery Confidence and Timing.

The committee proceeded to ask questions and debate the report. In summary, the following matters were raised, grouped in line with the key areas identified by the Chairperson.

Strategic Case

1. Clarification was sought to confirm that this land was not required for the Central Winchester Regeneration project to succeed.
2. It was asked whether a professional opinion on the condition of the building had been obtained.
3. Further clarification was sought regarding potential meanwhile uses for the building.
4. Further clarification was sought on whether demolition at the initial stage had been considered, rather than leaving the building in its current state.
5. An explanation was requested regarding the two title plans, specifically regarding the second plan showing a small triangle of land.

Financial Exposure

1. A question was asked to confirm that the purchase could be funded using internal borrowing rather than external finance.
2. Clarification was sought on what justified the current valuation of the site, considering the amount paid by the current owner and previous offers made by the council.
3. Concerns were raised regarding two areas of risk: the financial exposure and the risk associated with the interim use of the building.
4. Further clarification was sought on what would happen in a worst-case scenario, specifically whether the building could be let to provide an income.
5. Reassurance was requested from officers that the site could be let to mitigate potential losses, noting the significant risk to the council if the put option detailed in paragraph 2.3 was not exercised.
6. A question was asked regarding the timing gap before planning permission was granted, and what steps would be taken to ensure an income stream during that period.

Delivery Confidence and Timing

1. A question was asked as to why Jigsaw had chosen not to proceed with the purchase directly, resulting in the council having to acquire the building first.
2. A question was asked regarding what assurances could be provided that the programme remained on schedule, and how risks of delay were being mitigated,

3. A question was asked regarding the confidence in securing meanwhile uses and whether there was a timescale beyond which other options should be considered.

The committee agreed to move into an exempt session to consider the exempt appendix, during which further questions were raised which included the following: the valuation provided, de-risking the “worst case scenario”, the linkage to the wider CWR project, any impact to the council’s capital expenditure, the put option and de-risking any reputational risk.

The points from the open and exempt sessions were responded to by Councillor Martin Tod, Leader and Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Neil Aitken, Service Lead: Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer, Geoff Coe, Corporate Head of Asset Management, Ken Baike, Director of Regeneration, Simon Hendey, Strategic Director, Councillor Neil Cutler, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation and Laura Taylor, Chief Executive accordingly.

RESOLVED:

That the substance of the committee's discussion and the points as summarised above be reflected in the comments provided to cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 28 May 2026.

8. BAR END DEPOT DISPOSAL

Councillor Martin Tod, Leader and Cabinet Member for Regeneration introduced the report, ref CAB3552 which set out proposals for the Bar End Depot Disposal. The introduction included the following points.

1. The council had wanted to progress the Bar End Depot site for some time, and community engagement highlighted priorities for a convenience store and affordable housing. Improved access and permeability through the site were also key objectives.
2. The paper set out two bids which differed in regard to the size of the convenience store and the provision of 82 affordable homes versus a higher financial return.
3. Legal advice confirmed the council was able to make the decision to accept a lower financial return to secure these community benefits.
4. Public meetings had been held to shape the proposal that had been offered to the market.

Councillor Danny Lee addressed the committee. He noted that the proposal involved a trade-off between housing benefits and value for money to bring a brownfield site into productive use. He questioned whether accepting a lower bid to secure 82 affordable homes was appropriate and whether selling the site, rather than retaining it, was the right choice. He further highlighted the urgent need for social housing in the district and questioned whether the planning policy could be challenged to allow for higher-storey developments. Finally, he sought clarification on whether the proposal was appropriate given it did not explicitly guarantee social rent housing units alongside affordable housing.

The committee was asked to comment on the proposals within the attached cabinet report, ref CAB3532, which was to be considered by cabinet at its meeting on 28 May 2026.

The Chair invited members to focus their questions on two primary areas:

1. The balance of value, specifically the justification for accepting a lower financial offer in exchange for increased affordable housing and public benefit.
2. The deliverability of the project, including the degree of confidence in the proposed scheme coming forward and its reliance on planning consent.

The committee proceeded to ask questions and debate the report. In summary, the following matters were raised, grouped in line with the key areas identified by the Chairperson.

Balance of Value

1) A question was asked regarding how accepting a lower offer was justified in terms of affordable housing and wider public benefit.
2) A number of questions were asked regarding the housing element of the proposal including
   a) Whether the affordable housing units will be for rent, if there are restrictions on shared equity, and the percentage splits between social and shared ownership housing.
   b) Regarding the proposed 82 units, including the council's commitment to this number and what leverage exists to maintain it if the number is reduced during the planning process.
   c) The proposed housing mix, addressing the weighting towards four-bedroom properties compared to the local need for one and two-bedroom properties.
3) A question was asked about what safeguards were in place to protect the council's position if planning consent was not achieved or the scheme was delayed.
4) Further clarification was sought regarding risk management and what the capital receipt could be used for other than reducing previously unfinanced capital expenditure.

Deliverability

1) Further clarification was sought on the confidence in getting the site delivered and the anticipated timescales for delivery.
2) Further clarification was sought on the status of Homes England grant input and whether there were any conditions attached for the bidder to deliver the site.
3) Clarification was requested on whether there were any contamination issues to be aware of, given the previous uses of the site and whether the purchaser was covering the costs of any remediation works.
4) A question was asked about the evidence reviewed regarding the bidder's delivery performance, adherence to timescales, and commitment to the project.

Wider Considerations

1) Further clarification was sought on whether the local resident's group was content with the proposal, given the extensive previous engagement regarding a convenience store.
2) A question was asked whether the council was satisfied that access needs and traffic flow mitigations were adequately controlled ahead of planning discussions.

These points were responded to by Geoff Coe, Corporate Head of Asset Management, Councillor Martin Tod, Leader and Cabinet Member for Regeneration, and Neil Aitken, Service Lead: Finance and Deputy S151 Officer accordingly.

RESOLVED:

The committee agreed the following comments and recommended to cabinet:

1) That the committee supported the proposals and welcomed the provision of affordable housing.
2) That the committee expressed a keen interest in ensuring the proposed 82 housing units were built.
3) That the committee noted the importance of confidence in the deliverability of the scheme and supported the project moving forward.

9. **Q4 FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING 25/26**

Councillor Neil Cutler, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation introduced the report, ref CAB3550 which set out the Q4 performance monitoring for 2025/26. The introduction included the following points.

1. The report was the final quarterly performance report for the 2025/26 financial year, covering the period from 1 January to 31 March, and focused on progress in delivering the Council Plan priorities.
2. The full-year financial position for 2025/26 would be reported in a separate annual outturn report to the scrutiny committee on 7 September 2026.
3. The report format remained streamlined, with one update to include progress on the next Local Plan (2026-2044) following the adoption of the Winchester District Local Plan on 24 March 2026.
4. Key highlights included the collection of approximately 13 tons of food waste daily, the direction of £1 million of Community Infrastructure Levy funding into community-led projects, the approval of a balanced budget, and the procurement of four low-carbon and electric fleet vehicles.

Councillor Danny Lee addressed the committee and raised several points regarding the carbon neutrality programme. He felt that there were emerging gaps in decarbonising corporate assets, and was concerned that district carbon monitoring was two years in arrears. He welcomed the progress made on solar

PV and battery installations on council homes, but was concerned regarding the planned corrective actions for decarbonisation. He questioned if councillors would be included in the staff travel survey, and raised the potential impacts of the acquisition of the council's EV charging network operator.

Councillor Lee requested the timetable for the Local Authority Energy Plan and queried the omission of the HEP Committee's nutrient neutrality working group paper from the report, he asked how LGR risks would be captured in future performance reports, and suggested the need for a broader resilience strategy in light of telecom transition issues.

The committee was asked to raise with the Deputy Leader or relevant Cabinet Member any issues arising from the information in this report, ref CAB3550, which was being presented to cabinet on 28 May 2026 and to consider whether there were any items of significance to resolve or to be drawn to the attention of cabinet.

The Chair advised that the committee should focus its scrutiny on areas identified as underperforming or at risk. Key criteria for discussion included distinguishing structural or recurring issues from isolated variances, and assessing the subsequent impact on future service delivery and financial sustainability and that the report sections would be taken in turn.

The committee proceeded to ask questions and debate the report. In summary, the following matters were raised, grouped in line with the areas of focus identified by the Chairperson.

Climate and Environmental Delivery (Greener Faster)

1. An update was requested on the progress of the wastewater treatment plants and the recruitment of a project manager (page 150).
2. A question was asked regarding the expected date for the PV installation at Meadowside (page 147).
3. Further clarification was sought on what the minor works and projects for sustainable active travel improvements might be under the LCWIP (page 148).
4. A question was asked regarding at what point the corporate and district carbon reduction delivery, which had been flagged as amber for 12 months, should shift to require a formal recovery plan (pages 147 and 148).
5. Further clarification was sought on the Local Area Energy Plan and the timescales being considered (page 152).
6. A question was asked regarding the Local Area Energy Plan and the difference between the information presented on page 148 and page 152.

Housing Delivery and Asset Programmes (Good Homes for All)

1. Concerns were raised that the new homes programme, retrofit programme, and damp and mould programme had been marked amber for 12 months and a request was made for an indication of action for the new homes programme and other related programmes.

2. Further clarification was sought on what proportion of the amber status for damp and mould related to the private rented sector, and whether these should be separated from WCC stock in the report.

Place and Infrastructure (Thriving Places / Movement Strategy)

1. An update was requested on the northern park and ride (Sir John Moore Barracks) as there was no reference to it in the movement strategy (page 167).
2. A question was asked regarding the merging of the city and county LCWIP into one document (page 167).
3. Further clarification was sought on what schemes delivering traffic into the city might be funded.

Communities and Wellbeing (Healthy Communities)

1. Further clarification was sought on potential interventions at Meadowside to improve the usage numbers reported under healthy communities (page 160) and whether these numbers included the local parkrun (page 160).

Organisational Effectiveness and Digital (Efficient & Effective Council)

1. A question was asked regarding digital projects and the importance of understanding the resident experience, specifically EE3 (page 185).
2. A question was asked whether actions were being considered to improve the results of the digital programme.

These points were responded to by Simon Hendey, Strategic Director, Councillor Neil Cutler, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation and Councillor Martin Tod, Leader and Cabinet Member for Regeneration accordingly.

RESOLVED:

The committee agreed the following actions and comments to be drawn to the attention of Cabinet:

1. That future reports include greater clarity on whether the proposed actions in the next quarter would make a tangible difference to shift activities from amber to green.
2. That further information and actions regarding the pace of the Carbon Neutrality Action Plan (CNAP) delivery at both a council and district level be included in the next report.
3. That, building on the councils established resident survey work, the impact of the local government reorganisation (LGR) on resident perception could be sought over the coming years.
4. It was noted that responses to questions regarding Meadowside solar panels and attendance, the local area energy plan timetable, and the LCWIP minor projects be provided at Cabinet.

10. APPOINTMENTS OF EXTERNAL BODIES RELATED TO SCRUTINY

RESOLVED:

That the following appointments be made to the external bodies listed below:

1. Portsmouth City Council – Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel: Councillor V Achwal (deputy: Councillor Bennett).

2. Centre for Governance and Scrutiny – Southeast Regional Network: Councillor Wallace.

3. Partnership for South Hampshire Overview and Scrutiny Committee: Councillor Power (deputy: Councillor Batho).

11. ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2025/26

The Chairperson introduced the report, which set out the Annual Scrutiny Report. The committee was recommended to consider the report and make any necessary comments on the content before its submission to the full council.

The Chair noted that the report was a useful summary of the work undertaken across all three scrutiny committees over the past year. He expressed his thanks to the previous Chair of the Committee, as well as to the Chairs of the two Policy Committees and all committee members for their contributions.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:

That Council note the annual scrutiny report for 2025/26.

12. ANNUAL REPORT - EXCEPTIONS TO FORWARD PLAN 2025/26

The Chairperson introduced the report which set out the annual report concerning exceptions to the forward plan. The committee considered the report and noted that during the 2025/26 municipal year, the Chairperson of The Scrutiny Committee was informed of one key decision which was not included in the forward plan.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

13. TO NOTE THE DATE AND TIME OF FUTURE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE

The committee noted the dates of future meetings and the Chairperson agreed to consider a request for an additional meeting in October 2026.

14. **<u>TO NOTE THE LATEST FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS</u>**

RESOLVED

That the latest Forward Plan of Key Decisions be noted.

15. **<u>TO NOTE THE COMMITTEES CURRENT WORK PROGRAMME.</u>**

The Chair introduced the item and highlighted Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and parishing as two areas which he considered may be suitable for further scrutiny. He indicated that he wished to discuss these matters further with Cabinet Members and officers.

The Chair invited members to put forward suggestions for the work programme, both during the meeting and in the days following. The following items were identified for the Chair to consider:

a) the new Local Plan;
b) the South Downs National Park Plan; and
c) an update on the previous Task and Finish Group on Planning Enforcement.

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.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 9.40 pm

Chairperson