

Status of Scrutiny Reviews.

Economic Development, Culture & Leisure Scrutiny Panel.

1. Twinning.

The Panel met informally on 15 April 2009 to discuss the aims and objectives for this review. It met on 18 May to consider the project brief. The Panel met again on 15 June to hear from Drusilla Moody, Tourism and Visitor Services Manager, Mandy Lindley, Partnerships Manager (Voluntary and Community Sector) and Teresa Deasy, Democratic Support Officer.

The Panel met on 13 July to hear from:

- David Williams, Chief Executive.
- Councillor Robin Sparshatt.
- Councillor Mike Blake.
- Patricia Coward, Lord Mayor's Butler.
- Brian Hall, Chairman of the Association of the Britain-Australia Society. (Portsmouth Branch) and the Portsmouth-Sydney Sister City Committee.
- Alex Bentley, Chair of the Haifa Twinning Committee.

The Panel met on 11 August to hear about the potential economic benefits of twinning from representatives from the Chamber of Commerce. The Panel met formally on 10 September to receive details of the twinning budgets. It then moved into an informal session to consider the draft report. It held another informal meeting on 7 October and signed off the report on 10 November 2009. The report was heard at Cabinet on 8 February 2010, who approved the recommendations contained in the covering report.

2. Expenditure on Properties under the Culture Portfolio.

The panel met formally on 11 November 2009 and agreed its project brief for this topic. The panel subsequently met on 8 December 2009 and again on 13 January 2010 in order to clarify which properties fall under the culture portfolio and to narrow the focus of the view onto certain groups of properties. The panel chose to scrutinise properties classed as historic, those that provide a service to the public (community centres, libraries and sports facilities etc), and museums. The panel has received information on these properties from the Head of Cultural Services, Deputy Head of Asset Management, Community Projects Manager, Museum and Records Manager and Library Services Manager.

This information included an overview of the properties, their current condition, the properties use and visitor numbers. The panel was presented with detailed financial information, including how much had been spent over the previous three years, as well as what was predicted would need to be spent over the coming year.

Having had time to digest this information, the panel will next meet on 11 February 2010 to look at each property in more detail and ask questions of it, referring to the objectives listed in the project brief.

The Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel.

3. Attainment and Achievement in Portsmouth Schools

The Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel signed off the final version of the report "Inquiry into Raising Attainment and Achievement in Portsmouth Schools" at their meeting on 20 October 2009. The report was submitted to Cabinet on 11 January 2010. The Panel were thanked for their work and the recommendations were endorsed except for recommendation no.4 (recruiting another specialist Maths adviser) which would incur additional expenditure.

4. Schools' Policies on Sending Information to Separated/Divorced Parents

This topic is outstanding and remains on the Panel's work programme.

5. Protection of Vulnerable Children

The Panel held four formal evidence gathering meetings during their review into "Protection of vulnerable children". Meetings were held on 20 October 2009, 12 November 2009, 1 December 2009 and 28 January 2010 where the Panel considered reports and heard evidence from a wide range of organisations who have direct contact with children and young people who may be at risk of neglect: Local Safeguarding Children Board, PCT, police, Targeted Services, Education Welfare Service, Young Carers Support Service, social work team (assessment and intervention), head of Children & Families Social Care. Legal Services were represented at all the Panel's meetings.

The Panel carried out a site visit to the Social Work Team at Merefield House on 12 November 2009 to hear about the challenges faced by social workers in their jobs. The Panel is due to meet informally to discuss the draft report, conclusions and recommendations on 25 February 2010.

6. How Schools Handle Freedom of Information Requests

The Panel considered this issue at an informal meeting held on 24 November 2008 with officers. It resolved that a review was not necessary.

7. Discipline and Control of Unruly Children

The Panel agreed to review this topic as part of their work programme for the municipal 2009-10.

8. Teacher and Education Worker Protection and Safety.

The Panel agreed to review this topic as part of their work programme for the municipal 2009-10.

The Finance & Resources Scrutiny Panel.

9. Council Tax Discount for Pensioner Households.

On 22nd July 2008 the City Council supported a Notice of Motion from Councillor Steve Wemyss proposing that the City Council consider the introduction of a 10% council tax discount for all pensioner households in

Portsmouth from April 2009. Officers were instructed to bring forward a report to identify the broader implications of providing Council Tax discounts and to describe the procedural steps, timescale and likely costs of introducing a scheme.

The Council resolved that the Notice of Motion and subsequent Officer reports be referred to the Finance & Resources Scrutiny panel for further consideration.

The Finance & Resources Scrutiny Panel met on 9 December and received a report on matters to be considered before a decision can be made regarding the possibility of introducing council tax discount for pensioner households.

A further report was requested to be brought to the next meeting (21 January) to include decisions made at 9 December meeting. Contact would be made with Southampton City Council in order to obtain information about their Council Tax discount for pensioner scheme – in particular in relation to legal advice.

A further report was brought to the 21 Jan meeting. Councillors discussed the report and were also apprised of the legal issues by Michael Lawther in light of the legal advice obtained by Southampton City Council. As the meeting was not attended by any Conservative Members and as it was a Notice of Motion from the Conservatives, the Chair decided to delay sending any report to Council until after the budget meeting on 10 Feb.

A meeting of the Panel took place on 6 February 2009 to scrutinise the Budget report. The Strategic Director and Section 151 Officer advised the Panel that the purpose of this meeting was to give an opportunity to receive the slide presentation and make any comments or recommendations, which could be passed on to Cabinet and Council. The Head of Financial Services gave a slide presentation. The Panel recommended to Cabinet that the Head of Financial Services be invited to give her slide presentation to the meeting of full Council on Tuesday 10 February 2009.

The composition of the Panel changed following full Council on 10 February and the new Chair is Councillor Luke Stubbs. A meeting was held by the Chair with the S151 officer, the Head of Financial Services and the Head of Revenues and Benefits. The Panel met on 12 March to consider a further report from the Head of Revenues and Benefits.

The Panel signed off the report on 8 May 2009, with the recommendation that the council does not progress with the proposed council tax discount for pensioner households. The response to the Notice of Motion went before Full Council on 16 June 2009 stating that the NoM lodged on 22 July 2008 was not supported as the Finance & Resources Scrutiny Panel did not agree with introducing a discount for pensioner households during the 2009/10 municipal year. The response also recommended that further consideration be given to the proposal to introduce a discount for pensioner households as part of the 2010/11 budget process. Agreed by Full Council 16 June.

At the request of Full Council in June 2009, this matter was referred back to scrutiny to be considered as part of the budget proposals for 2010/11 financial year. The panel discussed this issue at their meeting on 2 October 2009 and agreed that a report from the Head of Revenue & Benefits would be brought to Full Council in November. The report will set out details of the Southampton scheme and estimates for set-up and administration costs for a similar scheme in Portsmouth. This will be forwarded to cabinet for review in November and for all political parties to consider whether to include a Council Tax Discount for Pensioner Households in their Budget proposals for 2010/11.

10. The City Council's Use of Consultants (lead with EDCL feeding into this review).

As the Panel composition had changed, on 29 May the Panel received a summary report from Val Lane and decided that it wished to look at the following departments in detail:

- Legal Services.
- Engineering.
- Community Engagement.
- Project Management and Local Strategic Partnership Work Procurement.

The Panel met again on 19 June and 24 July 2009 to receive reports from the Heads of Legal Services, Audit & Performance, Democratic & Community Engagement, Transport & Street Management and Asset Management.

The Panel has requested more detailed information be brought to its next meeting and anticipate concluding the review by late October and being able to produce a final report with recommendations by late November.

The next meeting will be on 21 August. This meeting was put back to enable officers to provide more detailed information as requested by the Panel.

The Panel met on 2 October 2009 and received reports from the Heads of Transport & Street Management, Financial Services and Asset Management. This concluded phase 2 of the review and the review is now moving in to phase 3, (which is the final phase) with the next meeting scheduled for 30 October 2009. At this meeting the Cabinet member for resources will attend together with the Head of Procurement.

The Panel has received all oral and written evidence for this review and a draft report is being compiled with a view to an informal meeting taking place on 4th December (TBC). Following completion of the report, it will be forwarded to cabinet for a formal response.

The panel has requested another formal meeting to hear evidence from officers regarding the procurement process for consultants engaged in Somerstown regeneration and the effectiveness of the in-house Graphic Design team. Following this meeting, the panel will meet informally to agree the conclusions and recommendations for this review.

The panel held a further meeting to hear from the Housing Development Manager and Corporate Communications Manager in respect of Somerstown Regeneration and the in-house graphic design team respectively.

The panel met on 4 February 2010 to formally sign off the review and requested that the chair of the scrutiny panel write to the group leaders to remind members of their commitment to attending scrutiny meetings.

Following a presentation from the Head of Financial Services on the proposed budget, the panel requested that the chair write to the group leaders to request that there be a cross party approach to budget setting in future years.

The Finance & Resources Scrutiny Panel has requested that they do not commence their next topic until the new municipal year.

11. Corporate Website & Access Strategy.

Originally this topic was issued to the Panel to be reviewed later in the work programme. However, the Chair of the Finance & Resources Scrutiny Panel has requested that it be considered after its consideration of Council Tax Discount for Pensioner Households.

The Panel agreed that it would be more appropriate to conduct this review after the website manager had been in post (started in June) for at least 3 months to enable him to put in place some of the systems that will enhance the access to and availability of information through the website.

The website manager is leaving Portsmouth City Council, therefore it may be prudent to consider this topic once alternative arrangements have been put in place.

12. Public/ Employee Suggestion Scheme.

Remains on the work programme for 2009/10.

13. The Cost of Democracy.

Remains on the work programme for 2009/10.

14. Accommodation in the Civic Offices Asset Management

Remains on the work programme for 2009/10.

15. Property Portfolio

Remains on the work programme for 2009/10.

16. Business Continuity

Remains on the work programme for 2009/10.

Transport, Environment & Community Safety Scrutiny Panel.

17. Trading Standards

The panel agreed its project brief at a formal meeting held on 18 December 2009 and at the same meeting received an overview of Trading Standards

from the Trading Standards Manager and Head of Environment and Public Protection Service.

At a meeting held on 21 January 2010 the panel heard from the following witnesses: Deputy Director of the Office of Fair Trading, Head of Adult and Family Learning, Team Manager of the Illegal Money Lending Team and a representative from Hampshire Constabulary.

The next meeting will be held on 12 February 2010, where the panel will gather further evidence from the Operations Director of Trading Standards South East Ltd, The Head of Trading Standards, West Berkshire Council and residents who have been involved with the Trading Standards Service.

A further meeting will be held on 5 March 2010, where the panel will aim to review the evidence received and begin to form recommendations for its report.

Housing & Social Care Scrutiny Panel.

18. Whether to Re-commence Building Council Homes

The Housing & Social Care Scrutiny Panel held three formal evidence gathering meetings during their review into "Whether to re-commence building council homes". Meetings were held on 6 October 2009, 27 October 2009 and 17 November 2009 where the Panel considered reports and heard evidence from housing services staff about the history of council and affordable housing, finance and resources for building homes, and the types of homes needed in Portsmouth. The Panel carried out a site visit on 17 November 2009 where they saw different examples of how the housing service is working to provide affordable homes in Portsmouth. The Panel signed off the review at their meeting on 2 February 2010 and hope to submit the review to Cabinet on 8 March 2010.

19. Mental Health Housing Provision.

This topic will be incorporated in the topic "Allocation of Housing Provision" (see paragraph 21).

20. Fraud in the Housing Service.

SMP agreed at their meeting on 27 November 2009 that this topic should be removed from the Panel's work programme following information submitted by the Head of Revenues & Benefits.

21. The Allocation of Housing including Local Authority Housing's under-occupation policy and mental health housing provision.

The topic "Allocation of Housing" is on the Panel's work programme for the 2009-10 municipal year and will incorporate the work programme items of the local authority's housing under-occupation policy and mental health housing provision. After the formal meeting on 2 February 2010 the Panel met informally to scope the review into "Allocation of housing to include Local Authority Housing's under-occupation policy and mental health housing provision". Formal evidence gathering meetings are scheduled for 23 February 2010 (how the Housing Register operates), 9 March 2010 (under-

occupation and overcrowding policies) and 25 March 2010 (different types of supported housing including mental health provision).

22. Local Housing Allowance.

As a result of a Notice of Motion at Full Council, the issue of the way in which Local Housing Allowance (LHA) was administered was sent to scrutiny to investigate. During the meeting of 16 July 2009 the matter was discussed and the panel unanimously agreed that they were satisfied with the way that Portsmouth City Council administered LHA, however, they were unhappy with the government legislation that Revenues & Benefits had to adhere to as they felt this removed tenant and landlord choice and led to increased rent arrears. The panel agreed that they did not wish to scrutinize this matter, however, they have requested that Portsmouth City Council write to the government to express their concerns regarding this legislation and seek to have the way LHA is administered, reviewed.

A letter is being drafted to be sent to central government expressing concerns about the way LHA is administered and seek a review. The Department for Work & Pensions Select Committee have completed a review into the way that LHA is being administered as they have received numerous complaints from tenants and landlords. They are due to report their findings in early January 2010. ***Review is now complete***

Health Overview & Scrutiny Panel.

23. Hyperbaric Chamber, Royal Hospital Haslar.

At its meeting on 1 December 2009, the HOSP considered the project brief for this review. It met on Thursday 5th February in order to carry out the stage 1 review of this topic. Witnesses include Portsmouth Hospitals Trust, QinetiQ, Sussex Police, South Central Ambulance Service and HM Coastguard. The HOSP decided to move to a stage 2 review, whereby the witnesses and objectives of the enquiry were expanded to reflect the information members felt they needed to complete the review. The Panel then met on April 15 in order to complete the review and examine final pieces of evidence. They agreed that they had received sufficient evidence in order to complete their report and make recommendations. The report was agreed at the HOSP 10 June meeting, and has been sent to external stakeholders (Care Quality Commission, QinetiQ, Portsmouth PCT, Portsmouth Hospitals Trust) for comment. – ***Review now complete***

24. St Mary's Community Campus.

The HOSP, together with members of Development Control and local Ward Councillors, attended a Seminar being run by Portsmouth Primary Care Trust around this issue on the 25th March. The information heard at this meeting then formed the project brief, which was agreed at the April 15th meeting. Members then met on June 23rd for a consultation with key stakeholders around the new Health Campus, asking questions centred around transport, infrastructure, landscaping and support facilities. Feedback was good, and comment has been summarised in a draft report. This is due to go to the 9 September HOSP meeting for agreement.

At the meeting of 9 September 2009, this report was signed off and sent to the Primary Care Trust for formal response. ***Review now complete***

25. Fluoridation of Drinking Water Supplies.

The South Central Strategic Health Authority decided that areas within Southampton PCT's remit would be fluoridated. Portsmouth PCT is currently awaiting the decision of the SHA in relation to the rest of the South Central Region. Due to an ongoing Judicial Review, the SHA have decided not to continue with this matter until the outcome of the Judicial Review.

26. Respite Care.

Members considered this item from Rob Watt, Head of Adult Social Care and Angela Dryer, Assistant Head of Adult Social Care, at the HOSP's meeting on 1st December. They decided no further information was required. ***Review now complete***

27. Care in the Community.

HOSP members heard about this item from Rob Watt, Head of Adult Social Care and Angela Dryer, Assistant Head of Adult Social Care, at the HOSP's meeting on 1st December. They decided no further information was required. ***Review now complete***

28. Alcohol Related Hospital Admissions.

At its meeting on 20 January 2010, the Panel agreed the project brief for this review.

On 4 March Dr Paul Edmondson-Jones, Director of Public Health & Wellbeing will give an overview of alcohol related admissions at QA hospital showing how it compares nationally. The Panel will also learn about the causes and the impact of alcohol abuse on different sections of society.

A Consultant and the Operational Manager for the Emergency Department, Portsmouth Hospitals Trust will also explain the methods used to record alcohol related admissions at QA Hospital and the referral system to treatment services.