

RECORD of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Tuesday 26 November 2024
at 2 pm at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Steve Pitt (in the Chair)

Dave Ashmore
Chris Attwell
Kimberly Barrett
Hugh Mason
Matthew Winnington

In attendance
Councillor Charlotte Gerada (agenda item 7)

87. Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Peter Candlish, Suzy Horton, Lee Hunt and Darren Sanders. Councillor Winnington gave apologies as he had to leave early to attend the National Children & Adult Services (NCAS) Conference in Liverpool. In order to accommodate Councillor Winnington, members agreed to consider agenda items 5 and 8 first but for ease of reference the minutes will be kept in the original order. Councillor Gerada made her deputation at the start of the meeting as she had to leave for work.

88. Declarations of Interests (AI 2)

The City Solicitor advised Councillors Pitt and Barrett that as dog owners they did not have a prejudicial interest in agenda item 5. There were no other declarations of interest.

89. Record of previous decision meeting - 29 October 2024 (AI 3)

The record of the previous decision meeting held on 29 October 2024 was agreed as a correct record.

90. City Vision (AI 4)

Kelly Nash, Corporate Performance Manager, introduced the report on behalf of Charlotte Smith, Assistant Director of Corporate Communications.

Councillor Pitt noted that feedback from the Team Portsmouth City Vision conference in July showed it was one of the best hosted in the city for some time. There had been considerable energy with contributions from different sectors and groups and much exciting feedback about what people would like to see for Portsmouth's centenary in 2026. Ideas would be taken forward and he thanked those involved very much for their effort.

The Cabinet noted the report.

91. Dog Control - Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) (AI 5)

Mark Collings, Seafront Operations Officer, introduced the report.

Councillor Pitt advised that the Cabinet would consider the two elements of the consultation separately.

With regard to the proposal to move the beach exclusion zone boundary further west so that it was level with the café business (currently the Coffee Cup) adjacent to St George's Road and Eastney Esplanade junction, Councillor Winnington said that as a ward councillor he was completely content with moving it as the Yomper statue (the current boundary marker) could not be seen from the waterline and led to inadvertent breaches. The response in favour of the move was overwhelming from dog owners and positive from non-owners. Councillor Winnington was not a dog owner but it was right and proper that there were good dog walking facilities. He thanked officers for the report and the consultation's successful response rate, one of the council's highest.

With regard to the introduction of a time limited restriction during the bathing season (1 May to 30 September) to replace the 24-hour exclusion at the Hotwalls and between Southsea Castle and the Coffee Cup, Councillor Pitt noted that although dogs were allowed in the area near Hovertravel it was not accessible until 2026 because of sea defences work. Councillor Winnington said that responses were much narrower in favour of time limited restrictions (and those in favour were overwhelmingly dog owners) and were particularly negative from non-owners. The responses needed to be considered as a whole and there was not enough evidence to remove the restriction. Neighbouring areas did not have time limited restrictions so dog owners from elsewhere could be attracted to the beach, making it more difficult to control. The beach was very wide up to the Coffee Cup so if the boundary was moved there would be a lot of extra space for dogs to run around and enjoy.

Councillor Pitt noted that about 35% of the UK were dog owners so the smaller response from non-owners was not proportionate to the level of dog ownership. Control of the seafront was demand led which meant the Seafront Operations Officer patrolling on his bike and duty officers at the weekend. At three miles long a time limited restriction would be almost completely unenforceable. If removal of the 24-hour exclusion attracted more people from outside the area it could upset the balance with local use where a clear majority were against removal and there was a responsibility to protect community cohesion.

If the boundary changed at Eastney it should be well signposted on the promenade and the other side of the Coffee Cup so people knew they were entering a no-dog zone. He requested Colette Hill's team to instal a mobile camera at the start of the bathing season as evidence would be needed of infringements, not just anecdotal accounts. There had been informal discussions about reviving the seafront patrol that was in place during the Covid pandemic to deal with issues and complaints.

Councillor Pitt read out the following statement, with which the City Solicitor needed to agree as it was a legal document.

"When considering any change to the current PSPO, it is important to look at the potential effectiveness and enforceability of any proposed changes.

It is also relevant to consider that around a third of UK households own a dog, whereas the survey respondents were made up of around 67% of dog owners / walkers and only 32% were non-dog owners.

The proposed change to the boundary at Eastney is primarily driven through practicality. The current boundary at The Yomper statue is not visible from the shoreline, so there is potential uncertainty about the current PSPO location for dog owners walking on the beach, which can cause confusion with infringement and enforceability of the current PSPO. Having a clear landmark, visible from the beach, will assist dog owners and walkers whilst also making clear what is the summer exclusion zone.

On the survey responses, there is a very clear overall majority in favour of the proposal to move the boundary to the Coffee Cup. Overall, 61% strongly agree (rising to 81% amongst dog owners) and even amongst non-dog owners, a minority are strongly against (47%).

On balance, we propose to change the boundary at Eastney to the Coffee Cup in line with the survey results and place signage at the Eastern edge of the Coffee Cup location at both promenade and beach and monitor its effectiveness via CCTV for the next season from 1 May to 30 September 2025.

On the second question in the consultation (designated timings) - allowing dog walkers access to all areas of the beach all year round, there is less support from residents, particularly non-dog owners - with 53% strongly against. Given the level of dog ownership nationally and the statistical reliability of the consultation, there is clearly a majority of beach users against a change.

Enforcement is also a concern. The beach stretches along the whole of the Seafront and without a dedicated Seafront Patrol team, monitoring the change and enforcing any infringements will be extremely problematic and could swiftly erode confidence amongst beach users. It is the administration's role to avoid anything that could lead to community tensions.

Additionally, we have consulted officers and no other coastal local authority within an hour's travel time of Portsmouth has such a policy in place. We are concerned that this could lead to a significant increase in dog owners travelling into the city from other areas in the summer, upsetting the current balance and placing an even greater burden on the need for effective enforcement.

We therefore reject the option to allow time limited beach access for dog walkers beyond the areas already designated under the existing PSPO at this time.

Dog walkers will still be able to access the area of Eastney Beach, now to be located east of the Coffee Cup. Once the new sea defences open between Blue Reef and Hovertravel, there will be access for dog walkers as currently. Both areas will be available all year round. The Hotwalls and the area between Southsea Castle and the Coffee Cup will remain a dog exclusion zone as currently.

The administration intends to trial a Seafront Patrol during the next bathing season to assist with public information around all the dos and don'ts across the area, helping to ensure that the needs of all Seafront users are balanced."

The City Solicitor agreed with the statement.

DECISIONS

The Cabinet agreed that

- 1. The beach exclusion zone boundary is moved so that it is level with the café business adjacent to St George's Road and Eastney Esplanade junction.**
- 2. The 24-hour exclusion period during the bathing season (1 May to 30 September) at the Hotwalls and between Southsea Castle and the café business adjacent to St George's Road and Eastney Esplanade junction remain in place.**

92. Use of pesticides update (AI 6)

Colette Hill, Assistant Director (Neighbourhoods), and Adrian Rozier, Parks Development Manager, introduced the report. Reducing use of pesticides was now business as usual across the council and guidelines aimed to reduce use while balancing matters such as health and safety, management of invasive species, and the impact on tourism. Use was considered on a case by case basis and in some areas it was appropriate. In Culture, Leisure & Regulatory Services there had been an 80% reduction of glyphosate in the last five years. Colas have reduced the strength of pesticides and considered alternatives.

In response to questions from members, officers explained that to further reduce the use of glyphosate in schools and academies its use would have to be monitored year on year as it was always subject to environmental conditions. There was work to be done with schools to see if they wanted to adopt the same maintenance as other areas, otherwise it would be constant evaluation. There was a significant reduction this year as there was a change in the product used along with relaxed mowing. Officers thought the minimum amount was being used at the moment.

Councillor Barrett, Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Greening the City, said the great report showed the work across departments on greening and the environment to increase biodiversity. Other methods were being considered, for example, "no mow" areas. It was good to see reduced pesticide use in parks and as services were now in-house the council could control them more easily. However, the council had a duty of care towards residents to ensure they did not trip up, and while it was easiest to continue using pesticides (some local authorities had had to revert to using them), Portsmouth was phasing them out in the right and proper way. Other local

authorities had talked to the team to see how to phase them out. As there had been complaints about graveyards being overgrown officers had looked at manual weeding or using one drip of a concentrated amount as well as using less glyphosate. Attitudes to weeds had changed and they were now known as "unconventional plants." Areas were considered on a case by case basis along with continual trials.

Councillor Pitt thanked officers for a good piece of work.

The Cabinet noted the report.

93. Sister City link with Valletta, Malta (AI 7)

Councillor Gerada made a deputation in favour of the proposal.

Claire Looney, Commissioning & Partnerships Manager, introduced the report, pointing out the strong links between Portsmouth and Valletta.

Councillor Attwell, Cabinet Member for Central Services, thanked the cross-party Twinning Advisory Group and officers for their work on the proposal. There were sufficient historic ties and strategic interest in the proposed link and Malta, "the tiny island of tolerance", mirrored Portsmouth in being a welcoming city. If members were minded to approve the proposal, he looked forward to developments in the coming months.

Councillor Mason said Portsmouth received many requests from many cities for twinning. He was enthusiastic about them as they could complement and learn from each other. Valletta was an appropriate link as it was a port, densely settled and people spoke excellent English.

Councillor Pitt agreed there was much to celebrate and the relationship should be explored. He passed on thanks to Carol Clark in Culture and hoped the link would come to fruition. However, in view of limited officer resource for twinning he recommended that though existing proposals could be discussed and developed no decisions on any twinning arrangements should be taken for at least six months.

DECISIONS:

The Cabinet agreed that

- 1. Officers be authorised to approach the City of Valletta in Malta to explore further their initial interest in entering into a Sister City relationship with the City of Portsmouth.**
- 2. In view of limited officer resource no decisions are taken on any twinning decisions for at least six months while the proposed arrangement with Valletta is formalised.**

94. Revenue Budget Monitoring 2024/25 (Second Quarter) to end September 2024 (AI 8)

Chris Ward, Director of Finance & Resources, introduced the report. The council was already well aware of the pressures behind the forecast net overspend of £12.6m - £5.6m for temporary accommodation, £3.2m for adult social care and £3m for children's social care placements; the latter portfolio

overall was experiencing pressures of over £5m. If provision was deducted from corporate contingency then the council needed to manage a residual overspend of about £5.1m. The contingency left over after accommodating the exceptional pressures could accommodate the overspend and leave a balanced budget. Key considerations for the next financial year were to what extent cost pressures remained as they were not explicitly planned for next year.

Councillor Winnington, Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing, Health & Care, said the same pressures were hitting all local authorities. Children's placements were a disaster with councils bidding for some that cost hundreds of thousands of pounds per week and were owned by hedge funds with no interest in care. Even after examining costs line by line, they had refused to decrease. Adult Social Care was affected by underlying inflation and the curve in demand appearing two or three years earlier than expected. The rise in employers' National Insurance (NI) contributions were planned for next year. At the LGA Conference councillors from all parties had asked what the government was doing this year but had not heard anything yet. Councillor Winnington was expecting a black mood at the NCAS conference. He and Councillor Horton would issue a plea to help now or councils would have to stop what they were doing for adults and children. The last government's legacy left councils in dire straits but the current government was not doing enough for them. Out of £1.3bn extra government funding for social care, £900m would be "gobbled up" by NI increases for adult social care alone so £400m would have to do everything else for adult and children's services. Seeing numbers like this with no help from the government led to panic stations. The situation was sobering and unavoidable and if not resolved would be even worse if the money did not touch the sides. It was incredibly difficult and he thanked everyone for everything they were doing.

Members echoed these comments and noted the variance was in statutory services so there was no scope for avoidance. The council had managed its finances remarkably well and minimised damage. They thanked Mr Ward and his team for keeping the council on an even keel.

Summing up, Councillor Pitt was extremely disappointed that the £4bn of core funding for local government would include £2.7bn from rises in Council Tax, and £1.3bn was likely to be used up by the council's suppliers paying higher wages and NI costs.

Councillor Winnington left the meeting after this item at 2.47 pm.

The meeting concluded at 3.05 pm.

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Councillor Steve Pitt
Leader of the Council