

**STRATEGY
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**24 March 2003
(6.00 –8.35pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Smart (Chair), Bagnall, Bradnack, Durrant, Knowles, Sian Reid, Schofield, Stuart and Ward. Councillor Hipkin as alternate member.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor David Howarth, The Leader. Councillor Colin Rosenstiel, The Deputy Leader.

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**03/STR/12 MINUTES**

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the meeting on 28 January 2003 as a correct record which were signed by the Chair.

03/STR/13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were none.

03/STR/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

03/STR/24 Councillor Howarth left the room and took no part in the discussion on this item. The reasons were listed on the agenda page and are based on any decision relating to the Grand Arcade scheme.

03/STR/15 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Ms N Glegg, Chair of Petersfield Area Community Trust addressed the Committee under 03/STR/18.

03/STR/16 GENERAL FUND REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS, CARRY FORWARDS AND SIGNIFICANT VARIANCES *(see also Record of Decision 03/STR/08)*

The Committee agreed (by 6 votes to 0) the recommendations for the Leader.

The Leader agreed the recommendations.

03/STR/17 OVERVIEW OF GENERAL FUND REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS, CARRY FORWARDS AND SIGNIFICANT VARIANCES *(see also Record of Decision 03/STR/09)*

The Director of Finance tabled an updated set of recommendations for the Committee to consider which took account of Executive Councillor decisions following Environment and Community Development & Leisure Scrutiny Committees

which had met after Strategy Scrutiny agenda papers had been despatched. In addition, the Director of Finance advised that recommendation as stated for £25,000 extra income from CCTV to be put into R and R funds would be amended to recommend a carry forward into 2003/04 to cover revenue costs of mobile CCTV with £50,000 from capital resources being available based on the projected capital outturn position. (*see also minute 03/STR/20*)

Councillor Stuart expressed concern over the slippage in the Capital Programme, the car park overspending and the inadequate response to the recent closure at Abbey Pool. Councillor Bagnall expressed concern that each committee had reported high variances and carry forwards after budgets had been agreed at Council in February. She said that Labour Group had no confidence that this situation would not be repeated next year.

The Leader advised the Committee that the additional use of reserves were well within the 5% tolerance permitted. Other than car park income, which was difficult to estimate year on year (although additional monitoring was to be in place from this financial year), the other items identified would be controlled in future years and were one-offs. The Leader did not accept that the Council responded inadequately over the closure at Abbey Pool, and officers were currently investigating possible legal action. The Council's Debt Free Status would save £100,000 in 2003/04. Regarding the Capital Programme slippage, much could be attributed to projects done in partnership which by their nature had delayed progress. However, these will continue to be closely monitored.

The Committee agreed (by 6 votes to 2) the recommendations (as amended in the tabled report of the Director of Finance and as stated above) for the Leader.

The Leader agreed the recommendations.

03/STR/18 DECENTRALISED DECISION MAKING: A STRUCTURE FOR AREA COMMITTEES (*see also Record of Decision 03/STR/10*)

Ms Glegg from Petersfield Area Community Trust addressed the Committee. She referred to e-mail exchanges with the Leader, which most members of the Scrutiny Committee had been copied into. She asked why organisations such as PACT, the Ethnic Community Forum and Better Government for Older People had not been included in the consultation. She asked how the Area Committees were to be publicised and how access to venues and any transport to them would be addressed (e.g Petersfield residents would find it difficult to get to Coleridge Community College). She asked whether there would be a right of appeal for applicants on the decision taken determining at which committee (area or central) a planning application would be considered.

The Leader stated that the member/officer working group had intended that each area committee meet at a fixed venue. The consultation had resulted in different preferences on venues and timings, and it would be for Area Committees to decide from experience what makes for effective working and what does not. Regarding

making available transport for those wishing to attend or paying travel costs, this would have to be a matter addressed at a future time.

In introducing the report, the Leader advised the Committee that the proposals had been developed through a member/officer working group and from the experiences of other local authorities. He stated that the issue of venues still required further discussion but would ultimately be for area committees. He referred to paragraph 7.5 of the covering report which may lead to area committees of different political control to the Council as a whole, which was an important principle.

Councillor Bagnall proposed an amendment:

“delete recommendations 2.1 to 2.3 and replace with:

2.1 that one area committee is set up on a pilot basis covering the north area of the city shown on maps 1,2 and 4 of appendix 2

2.2 that the area committee meet initially on an eight weekly cycle and develop a style and format of working to meet the needs of the local community and the experience be used to help formulate recommendations for implementation of a full programme of area committees citywide.

2.3 that the function delegated to the area committee (see para 6.3) exclude planning applications, that officer representation at committee meetings include housing staff as and when appropriate, and cost savings associated with the planning officer and committee manager functions be invested in community development support as outlined in the Labour Group budget amendment to Council in February.

2.4 That half the available budget for environmental improvements be ring fenced for the area covered by the committee in 2003/04 with a view to distributing future budgets on a per capita basis weighted by relative disadvantage.

With consequential amendments to remaining recommendations”

Councillor Bagnall highlighted the Labour Group view that not enough of the allocated budget was focused on facilitating local groups, where community development would be best placed to make a positive contribution. There also needed to be the opportunity for housing matters to be raised which would require housing officers at area committees (without cutting across existing practices) for which there was currently no budget. She also re-iterated that Labour Group were opposed to delegating planning applications to area committees.

The amendment was lost by 3 votes to 6.

The Leader advised the Committee that a pilot area had been considered at an earlier stage, but his preferred approach was to review area committees after 18 months, thereby piloting area committees by time not one area. He was of the view that area committees needed to be applied across the city to ensure that the

approach was adequately tested. He suggested that housing issues would be dealt with during the first session of an area committee (the open forum), and should not cut across any established tenant fora nor the responsibilities of elected tenant representatives. The Leader stated that there was evidence gathered from other authorities which suggested that residents were keen to attend when planning applications were considered, and then they could engage with other area committee matters.

Councillor Stuart favoured a pilot approach but did not agree with the proposal to divide the EIP fund. Councillor Hipkin spoke in favour of including planning applications at area committees as the current Planning Committee agendas were overlong, which he thought could reduce the quality of decision making toward the end of meetings and there was a strong argument for local councillors to determine applications they are likely to be more familiar with because of local knowledge. He suggested that each area committee should nominate at least two, but no more than three, councillors to the main Planning Committee. Councillor Bradnack disagreed, stating that having to determine applications at an area committee would reduce his capacity to speak on behalf of his community. He stated that once in place the system would be difficult to 'unplug' and therefore did not believe that it was a trial. Councillor Schofield stated that it would be the capacity to manage the process which would be the test for area committees. He referred to PACT's emails which he had found helpful and referred to 17 natural community groups living in Cambridge (taken from a Community Development publication 'Community Facilities in Cambridge'), which he suggested should be used as the building blocks of area committees.

Councillor Bagnall proposed a second amendment:

'That area committees meet no less frequently as the main Planning Committee (so long as development control is a function of area committees)'

She stated that the amendment intended to reduce the likelihood of an inequitable service to applicants which was likely if the current proposals went ahead. The Leader stated that it was yet to be established how often the main Planning Committee needed to meet. He re-iterated that the proposal to delegate some planning applications had been based on the Council's current practices and evidence gathered from other local authorities which had delegated to area committees, but if alterations were required, then this would be done. The Director of Environment & Planning advised the Committee that there would be some delays to the turnaround of applications, but overall the effect was expected to be marginal.

The second amendment was lost by 3 votes to 6.

Councillor Durrant re-stated his opposition to the proposal and said he believed that it would be divisive. He favoured a neighbourhood or parish approach. Councillor Stuart referred to the consultation which had not asked consultees as a starting point whether area committees were a good idea.

Councillor Bagnall queried the attendance of county councillors and the issue of

wards which were not co-terminous wards. She was also concerned about themed meetings which covered services the City did not control (eg education). The Leader stated that as the County Councillors were non-voting they could attend whichever area committee they wished. Referring to themed meetings (para 7.4 of the covering report), he agreed that education may not have been a sensible example to give, but all other themes listed in the report had some city council involvement through working in partnership.

The Committee agreed (by 6 votes to 1) the recommendations from the Leader.

The Leader agreed the recommendations.

03/STR/19 EQUALITIES PANEL (*see also Record of Decision 03/STR/11*)

In response to comments from members, the officers undertook to appoint the public representatives to the Panel using as fair and open a process as practicable.

The Committee agreed the recommendations for the Leader.

The Leader agreed the recommendations.

03/STR/20 MOBILE CCTV CAMERAS (*see also Record of Decision 03/STR/12*)

In introducing the report the Director of Central Services advised the Committee that the Council had secured a grant from the Community Safety Partnership of £40,000 toward the scheme. Therefore, with the £50,000 capital and £25,000 revenue identified in the Director of Finance's Overview report (minute 03/STR/17), a mobile CCTV scheme and two cameras could be recommended for approval. She stated that officers would endeavour to meet the on-going additional revenue costs of £25,000 pa from the CCTV budget, but could give no guarantee that this figure would be achieved every year. The Committee noted that a technical review would first be undertaken, with a project appraisal being reported to Commercial & Human Resources Scrutiny Committee if the scheme could at least technically proceed.

Councillor Hipkin expressed opposition to the further expansion of CCTV. Councillor Bradnack stated that the Labour Group alternative budget had included £120,000 which would have enabled six rather than two cameras to be installed. Councillor Stuart welcomed the proposal, but agreed with Councillor Hipkin that civil liberties needed to be protected.

The Committee agreed (by 6 votes to 0) the recommendations (reflecting initially two cameras and the system at a cost of £90,000) for the Leader.

The Leader agreed the recommendations.

03/STR/21 **BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN** (see also *Record of Decision 03/STR/13*)

The Committee (by 7 votes to 0) and the Leader agreed that the Chief Executive report the BVPP to Council on 22 May for consideration, scrutiny and approval.

03/STR/22 **FREEHOLD PURCHASE OF PROPERTY FOR USE FOR CLINIC FOR THE HOMELESS - DECISION BY THE LEADER**

In response to a request from Councillor Bradnack, the Leader undertook to discuss with the Executive Councillor of Housing & Health the possibility of CCTV for the premises and the nearby locality (particularly the roundabout/underpass) and also to consider the impact on Abbey Road residents if a facility for the homeless was to be planned at the north end of the Road.

03/STR/23 **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS & PUBLIC**

The Committee agreed to exclude members of the public from the remainder of the meeting on the grounds that, if they were present, there would be disclosure to them of information defined as exempt from publication by Categories 7&12 as defined in the Council's Constitution part 4B (page 154/5).

03/STR/24 **KEY DECISION GRAND ARCADE – DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT & ASSOCIATED MATTERS** (see also *Record of Decision 03/STR/14*)

The Committee agreed the recommendations for the Deputy Leader as stated in the report.

The Deputy Leader agreed to the recommendations.

The meeting ended at 8.35pm.

CHAIR