



# Minutes

Name of meeting	<b>SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>
Date and time	<b>15 MAY 2008 COMMENCING AT 6.00 PM</b>
Venue	<b>COMMITTEE ROOM ONE, COUNTY HALL, NEWPORT, ISLE OF WIGHT</b>
Present	Cllrs. Muriel Miller (Chair), Ivan Bulwer, William Burt, Vanessa Churchman, Deborah Gardiner, Heather Humby, Gill Kennett, Brian Mosdell, Erica Oulton, Lady Pigot, Margaret Webster,
Co-opted Members (voting)	Mrs Sue Poston, Mr Charles Rogers.
Co-opted Member (non voting)	Mr Bob Blezzard.
Other Members Present	Cllr Barry Abraham, Cllr George Brown, Cllr Dawn Cousins.
Officers Present	Mr Ashley Curzon, Mrs Jill Laurence-Tilley, Ms Bernadette Marjoram, Mr Chris Mathews, Mr Bill Murphy, Mr Paul Thistlewood.
Apologies	Mr Garry Price, Mrs Sara Sheath, Mr Adrian Smith.
6.	<b>Minutes</b>  <u>RESOLVED:</u>  THAT the Minutes of the meeting held on <a href="#">29 April 2008</a> be confirmed.
7.	<b>Declarations of Interest</b>  Mr Bob Blezzard declared a personal interest in Minute Numbers 9- 13 as he was a member of Sandown Town Council and Clerk to Yarmouth Town Council.
8.	<b>Public Question Time</b>  There were no public questions.

9. **Enquiries into Planning Issues – Follow up to the responses made to the recommendations.**

The Scrutiny Committee was reminded of the three enquiries that it had undertaken during 2006 on planning issues. In addition the concerns of several Town and Parish Councils relating to planning enforcement had been raised at the January 2007 meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Economy, Planning and Property informed the Committee that the Planning Advisory Service had carried out a peer review of the service in June 2007 and the improvement plan arising from this had been reported to the Cabinet in November 2007. All these had highlighted areas of service delivery where improvements were required if additional resources were made available.

The Head of Planning Service circulated a detailed graph plotting the quarterly performance for Development Control over the last five years. This identified the key circumstances behind the level of performance for dealing with major, minor and other applications for the period 2004 to 2008. Although the government targets for applications had been attained by 2006, and in some areas exceeded, the Head of Planning Services believed that this was to the detriment of the quality of what was being approved and good customer relations.

Changes were being introduced to become more customer focussed and encourage more dialogue with applicants prior to the submission of an application. This avoided the number of applications that were refused within the time limits first time round because of insufficient or incorrect information and having to be resubmitted without the need for the payment of a fee. This also impacted on the number of appeals.

With regard to enforcement there had not been a dedicated team of officers for a number of years. Resources had been agreed in the 2008/09 budget for the appointment of additional posts to this specific area. The Committee had received comments from a number of Town and Parish Councils on specific enforcement concerns and the Head of Planning agreed to respond to these.

Because of a national shortage of qualified planning officers recruitment to new and existing posts was proving difficult and it was intended to utilise a private company to undertake a range of activities.

Senior management was now ensuring that all staff were aware of the services aims, objectives and vision so that these were consistently applied. The Head of the service had been involved in the Personal Development Review process of all staff so that the service became more proactive and a structure development programme could be formulated. An overall snap shot of the separate areas of the service was given by the Head of Planning Services. The Director of Regeneration and Development said that with the additional core funding and clearer leadership service improvements would start to follow.

The Audit Commission had also undertaken a review of the service in February 2008. Their report would shortly be available and this would help in providing an indication if the actions now being introduced will improve service delivery.

Members questioned the action being taken to maximise Section 106 contributions. The involvement of local members and Town and Parish Councils in the process of ensuring effective community benefit was obtained was an area that officers could be asked to investigate further.

It was noted that Members involvement in, and understanding of, the planning process should also be strengthened with an established on-going training programme. This should result in a better informed decision being made and in turn a reduction in appeals.

The Cabinet Member for Economy, Planning and Property concluded that the Planning Service was now focusing on quality and consistency and not on reaching national targets. The need to improve customer satisfaction with the service was also a priority area.

The Chairman requested that the Head of Planning ensure that staff be made aware that there was no criticism of them from the Committee and members were appreciative of their hard work. The service had lacked a consistent, integrated vision and working practices together with insufficient resources. This was now being rectified by the Cabinet Member, Director and Head of Service.

RESOLVED:

- i. THAT the Director of Regeneration and Development, in conjunction with the Chairman of the Planning Committee and the Cabinet Member for Economy, Planning and Property, ensure that there is regular training sessions for members of the Planning Committee built into the meeting calendar so that these are known a year in advance.
- ii. The Cabinet Member for Economy, Planning and Property together with the Director of Regeneration and Head of Planning Services should offer to meet with the IW Association of Local Councils on a yearly basis
- iii. The Cabinet Member for Economy, Planning and Property and the Chairman of the Planning Committee should ensure that a quarterly report is submitted to the Planning Committee on Section 106 Agreements and the use of associated payments and works.
- iv. The Head of Planning Services should consult with local members and Town/Parish Councils over the use of Section 106 monies.

- v. The Cabinet Member for Economy, Planning and Property submit a report in six months time on the progress being made on implementing actions arising from the Audit Commissions inspection of the planning service undertaken in February 2008.

10. **QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE/RISK MANAGEMENT REPORT**

The Chairman apologised to the Cabinet Members for the delay in reaching this agenda item due to the time taken on the previous item.

The Cabinet Member for Residents and Resources advised that in order to reduce printing costs the coloured traffic light performance management report had been printed in black and white but with an appropriate key being provided.

The Cabinet Members had been supplied in advance with a number of questions. They had prepared detailed written responses and due to the lateness of the hour these would be electronically forwarded to Committee

The Cabinet Member for Residents and Resources requested the involvement of the Scrutiny Committee on the performance of the Council in handling complaints.

Members noted that the numbers of officers attending Procurement training was still low. They believed that it should be mandatory to attend and pressure be placed on officers who do not attend, possibly through their line managers and Personal Development Reviews.

With the regard to the Council's insurance arrangements members were made aware that due to a recent procurement exercise a new insurance policy had been agreed which would provide a saving to the Council.

The Chairman queried the measurement for the availability of the ICT service. This was only for the hours of 08.00 to 18.00 Monday to Friday and did not take into account member's requirements outside of those times. The Cabinet Member indicated that a range of action was being taken to improve the Council's network.

The Acting Head of Regeneration responded to questions on the tourism performance figures. It was accepted the process for collecting these should be re-assessed. The Cabinet Member for Economy, Planning and Property advised that along with the rest of the country it was recognised that the economic downturn may well have an effect on visitor numbers but early indicators from the ferry companies were encouraging.

The Committee raised concerns about the Council's relationship with the Chamber of Commerce, particularly with regard to tourism. The Cabinet Member indicated that the Chamber was involved in the drafting of the Economic Strategy which was to be considered by full Council on 18 June 2008.

The Cabinet Member for Health, Wellbeing and Supporting People informed the Committee that the service was one of the highest performing in the country and had national recognition on three areas of good practice.

RESOLVED:

- i. THAT the Cabinet Member for Residents and Resources should meet with the Performance Management Task Group to scope an enquiry into the Council's complaints system.
- ii. THAT Directors be requested to ensure that all appropriate staff attend the training provided on procurement as part of their PDR and relevant disciplinary action be taken if there is a failure to attend such a course.

11. **COUNCIL CONSTITUTION – PROTOCOL ON THE COUNCIL'S DECISION MAKING PROCESS**

Due to the lateness of the hour it was agreed to defer this item to the next meeting.

RESOLVED:

THAT the views of members of the Committee be collated on the proposed amendments to the Call in provisions and reported to the next meeting.

12. **FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee asked that clarification be sought on the Isle of Wight Festival Contract.

RESOLVED:

THAT the response be circulated to all members when it had been received.

13. **PROGRESS REPORT ON OTHER CURRENT ENQUIRIES**

The Anti Social Behaviour task group would be visiting the Council's Call Centre the following week as part of its evidence gathering.

CHAIRMAN