

AT A MEETING of the Countryside, Culture and Communities Select Committee
of HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL held at the castle, Winchester on Monday,
7th November, 2022

Chairman:

* Councillor Rob Mocatta

Vice-Chairman:

* Councillor Jackie Branson

Councillor Lulu Bowerman
* Councillor Steven Broomfield
* Councillor Pamela Bryant
* Councillor Peter Chegwyn
* Councillor Rod Cooper
* Councillor Alex Crawford
* Councillor Barry Dunning
Councillor Dominic Hiscock
* Councillor Hugh Lumby

Councillor Alexis McEvoy
* Councillor Lesley Meenaghan
Councillor Tanya Park
* Councillor Ann Briggs
* Councillor Malcolm Wade

*Present

Also present with the agreement of the Chairman:

Councillor Russell Oppenheimer, Executive Member for Countryside, Culture and
Communities

Councillors Stephen Philpott and Peter Latham

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors Bowerman, Hiscock, McEvoy and Park.

Councillors Briggs and Wade were in attendance as deputy members.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were mindful that where they believed they had a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any matter considered at the meeting they must declare that interest at the time of the relevant debate and, having regard to the circumstances described in Part 3, Paragraph 1.5 of the County Council's Members' Code of Conduct, leave the meeting while the matter was discussed, save for exercising any right to speak in accordance with Paragraph 1.6 of the Code. Furthermore Members were mindful that where they believed they had a Personal Interest in a matter being considered at the meeting they considered whether such interest should be declared, and having regard to Part 5,

Paragraph 5 of the Code, considered whether it was appropriate to leave the meeting whilst the matter was discussed, save for exercising any right to speak in accordance with the Code.

No interests were declared at this point in the meeting.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Culture and Communities Select Committee meeting held on 12 July 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

4. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman introduced his announcements by highlighting that on Friday 4 November the Arts Council announced their future National Portfolio. National Portfolio Organisations (NPO's) receive annual revenue funding from the Arts Council. It was heard that overall, it is very good news for Hampshire with many existing NPO's retaining their funding, and new organisations joining the National Portfolio for the first time representing a diverse arts and cultural offer, spread across the County. Of particular note to this Committee is that Hampshire Cultural Trust have been awarded £500,000 per year. In addition, many organisations have been awarded funding to work in Arts Council priority places (Rushmoor, Gosport, New Forest). The Chairman informed that overall this represents a good deal for Hampshire, with hundreds of thousands of pounds coming into arts and culture in Hampshire every year for the next few years. It is a huge credit to the organisations involved for the hard work they have put in, but also speaks more broadly to the confidence that the Arts Council has in the pan-Hampshire region and the opportunities here for the cultural and creative sector.

The Chairman also announced that the County Council's Keep Warm, Keep Well initiative has been launched. This one-stop web page provides advice, support and information to help those suffering hardship this winter. As part of this, Hampshire Libraries have been promoting their Warm and Welcome messaging to ensure wider community awareness of the free, safe and inclusive community space they provide for all. As well as the usual range of fun and free activities, courses and groups, there are a range of new initiatives including Coat Exchanges; Uniform Swaps; Period Poverty Stations; a new Community Fridge partnership at Hythe; the planned launch of ChatAbout in partnership with Public Health and an after-school club in partnership with Food Pantry at Hayling Island. Targeted Cost of Living events have been held at 11 libraries (one per district). Library managers worked with local partners and community organisations to target those most in need and to connect them to relevant local advice and services; attendees were offered Warm Bags and supermarket vouchers as part of the Household Support Fund. These events proved extremely popular. Further activity will continue through the winter, and the Chairman advised Members to check Hampshire Libraries social media information on what is going on in their local Library.

The Chairman also informed Members that Hampshire Registration has been recognised at the Local Registration Service Association annual awards. Katie Thompson has won the LRSA Young Person's Award as someone who stands out and is already making a notable contribution to your team and is a

registration professional of the future. Meanwhile Jeff Martin has been awarded with the Long Service Award as a registrar with 25 years or more experience in registration who has made a significant contribution to the profession. The Chairman extended congratulations to Katie and Jeff.

In relation to Country Parks, the Chairman highlighted that Lepe, River Hamble, Royal Victoria, Queen Elizabeth, and Staunton Country Parks have all once again gained Green Flag status in recognition of their excellent facilities. Staunton Country Park and Royal Victoria Country Park have also once again scooped Green Heritage Accreditation for the management of these sites' unique historic features.

Lastly the Chairman informed Members that in July a Parish Pollinator networking event was attended by 11 parishes followed by a site visit to Reeds Farm in Empshott. This enabled parishes to share their projects and ideas as well as receiving training on meadow restoration, plant identification and survey methods. It was heard that there is a huge amount of enthusiasm for the project with two of the parishes promoting the pollinator theme for their village fete this year. This was led by parishes but supported by the Countryside Service who provide advice support and training as well as access to some resources. The Chairman highlighted the aim to grow the number of parishes involved and he hoped Members of the Committee will share this information and point their parishes to the HCC Parish Pollinator webpages.

5. DEPUTATIONS

There were no deputations.

6. TITCHFIELD HAVEN NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE - BRIEFING ON PROPOSALS

The Committee received a presentation briefing on proposals for Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve (Item 6 in the Minute Book). The Chairman highlighted to Members that this was an information item only, and would enable Members of the Committee a chance to ask questions on the proposals ahead of the proposals being pre-scrutinised at Select Committee on the 7 December.

The Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services introduced the presentation and explained that officers felt it was important for Members to receive this briefing, and highlighted that the full business case on the proposals had recently been published and Members will have received sight of this. The strength of feeling relating to the proposals was acknowledged by officers in relation to the recent public engagement exercise, but Members heard that the visitor centre, shop and cafe situated in Haven House were financially unsustainable, with a net cost of £80,000. It was heard that the proposals to sell Haven House and Haven Cottage would generate capital receipt, some of which would be re-invested in the Nature Reserve which the County Council have a statutory responsibility in managing and maintaining. The Director also highlighted that Titchfield Haven is a Nature Reserve and not a country park, and the Nature Reserve receives 15,000 visits annually and 85,000 visits to the café.

Members were taken through the presentation slides giving further details on the proposals, and the drivers for change and budget pressures were explained. Officers highlighted the options considered and the recommended option which was to change focus and manage the site without a café, shop and visitor centre, thus reducing costs by £60,000 annually. The sale of the buildings would release capital income to be invested in the Nature Reserve. The proposed option would also enable the County Council to retain a strong visitor offer in the Nature Reserve, opportunities for seasonal catering, maintain admissions and membership with digital tickets and improved facilities within the Nature Reserve. It was heard that there would be a workforce impact with a staff reduction from 15 to 5, with staff being moved into the wider countryside site team.

The Chairman thanked Officers for the briefing and encouraged Members of the Committee to visit the Nature Reserve in the next few weeks.

In response to Members' questions it was confirmed that:

- Other options have been fully investigated, but there isn't a strong and robust business case to justify the level of investment required to change the proposals.
- The figures have been analysed and it wouldn't be cost effective to improve both the Nature Reserve and Haven House, given the current condition of the House and changes needed to transform how the space is used in the House.
- If Fareham Borough Council declares Haven House as an asset of community value, then this would prevent the sale of it for six months.
- Previous discussions with a potential partner organisation were not successful because of the dowry cost in taking on liability for the buildings, and unfortunately no other organisation has come forward to offer help. A meeting with Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust would be taking place soon, which may offer an alternative solution.
- There have been no offers from Fareham Borough Council to take on the running costs of Haven House.
- Fareham Borough Council have recently introduced car parking charges which may have impacted visitor numbers.

Councillor Bryant declared an interest at this point in proceedings as a member of Fareham Borough Council.

- Catering at the Council's country parks works well, but this is part of a wider income strategy for car parking, which encourages people to visit more often and stay longer. HCC has been successful in securing National Lottery funding for other projects however the Nature Reserve does not meet the criteria, which focuses on heritage, and the level of national importance.
- The market dictates the cost of the café's food prices and putting up the cost of prices to generate more money wouldn't be longstanding, and investment in the building would also be required. The average spend in the café is also low at approximately £3.50.
- Hiring out office rooms in Haven House for meetings wouldn't generate a large income, and there are challenges as a Local Authority for letting out the flat, which has been let to staff for 7 of the last 10 years.

- The Haven House budget covers the cost of staff, food and the overall building costs, and together with the visitor centre is generating a loss of £80,000 annually.
- As part of the proposals, there would be space created for volunteers and parking passes would be maintained for them.
- Part of the proposals is to improve the facilities to and within the Nature Reserve. This would include improvements to the hides, ensuring people have clear access to the Nature Reserve and an accessible toilet, ensuring the importance of habitat for wildlife and investing in resilience for future climate/coastal changes.

The Chairman thanked officers for the update.

7. **TRADING STANDARDS UPDATE**

The Committee received a report of the Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services for pre-scrutiny, before consideration by the Executive Member for Countryside, Culture and Communities, providing an update on Trading Standards following its restructure in 2021/22, and seeking approval of its updated enforcement policy and endorsement of its communications strategy. (Item 7 in the Minute Book). The new Head of Trading Standards, Richard Strawson, was introduced to the Committee, and it was heard that he had taken up this position in September.

A presentation was shown to the Committee which highlighted key aspects of the report including details of the restructure, staff, customers, current resources and strategic priorities, along with the proposals due to be considered by the Executive Member.

In response to Members' questions it was confirmed that:

- It is difficult to compare Hampshire with other Local Authorities (LA's) because of different demographics, but income level is high compared to other LA's, largely due to the geographical location. Hampshire also receive OPSS funding for product safety work which other LA's don't receive.
- The focus of the service is on its strategic aims and priorities going forward, utilising resources in the best way, managing expectations to deliver a good service and to ensure a structure is in place to control demand.
- The County Council has seen significant budget reductions over the last few years, and the restructure would strengthen the service for the future as part of an evidence led approach.
- In relation to paragraph 18 of the report, it was confirmed that complaints are not ignored, but not every complaint is followed up with an investigation. In these instances, officers would use the information provided as intelligence to best target resources in line with priorities.
- The service has recently recruited four apprentices.
- Prosecution is seen as the last resort, and officers are both mindful of the public expense to prosecute but also whether prosecution will be successful, and is this in the public interest.

- In relation to health checks on dogs coming into the country from overseas, there are pet passport controls at Southampton and Kent docks, and at the point of import the Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA) will act if there are concerns.
- A recent email received by the Committee about the Trading Standards service was discussed, and would be responded to.
- In relation to paragraph 2.1 of the Trading Standards Enforcement Policy at Appendix 2, this wording would be clarified further by officers.

Members of the Select Committee were also shown some recent news footage from ITV Meridian about Trading Standards and safety standards:

[Warning as some Halloween-themed products fail to meet safety standards 'putting lives at risk' | ITV News Meridian](#)

The Chairman invited the Executive Member for Countryside, Culture and Communities to speak, and he thanked officers for all their hard work in protecting consumers in Hampshire. He also noted that while the focus is on Hampshire, there was also a national role with goods coming into the country through Southampton, and it was important to understand this national role.

The Chairman thanked the Executive Member and the recommendations to the Executive Member were unanimously supported by the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the Countryside, Culture and Communities Select Committee supported the report, and recommended to the Executive Member for Countryside, Culture and Communities that he:

- i. Note the strategic priorities for Trading Standards and their alignment with the County Council's four Strategic Aims as set out in Appendix 1.
- ii. Approve the revised Enforcement Policy for Trading Standards.
- iii. Endorse a proactive external communications strategy to increase public awareness of risks, facilitate community protection and deter criminality. This approach will augment the impact of direct service delivery, mitigating resource pressures and promoting the benefits of partnership working.
- iv. Note plans to conduct a review of all commercial activity over the next 12 months, with the intention of bringing a commercial strategy for the service to the Executive Member in 2023.

8. **CCBS (CULTURE, COMMUNITIES & BUSINESS SERVICES) RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION UPDATE**

The Committee received a report of the Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services providing an update on recruitment and retention within Culture, Communities and Business Services (Item 8 in the Minute Book). This

update had been requested for the work programme at a previous meeting by Councillor Chegwyn.

The report was presented to the Committee and key areas were explained, which included national drivers such as more organisations offering flexible working.

Changes to recruitment which have been made both by the department and across the organisation were detailed, which included highlighting the benefits of working for the service/organisation, analysing role profiles and providing guidance to managers. It was heard that in some areas there has been improvement, but in others such as the coroner's office, vacancies have been harder to fill. The impact of Brexit and the Covid pandemic on recruitment and retention was also discussed.

Councillor Chegwyn thanked officers for a good report. He highlighted that a lot of County Council staff love their jobs, but there were pressures across the job market and many roles were hard to recruit to. He also highlighted the cost of living in a county such as Hampshire.

In response to Members' questions it was confirmed that:

- Officers have responded quickly to recruitment pressures overall, and this is an issue across the organisation which has been taken seriously, and different ways to recruit have been explored.
- Some people have a certain perception of working for local government, and some may be wary of joining an organisation where they're not aware of the longevity of a role.

Councillor Briggs left at this point in the proceedings.

- In relation to recruitment pressures in the coroners service, there were also a number of other factors to take into consideration such as an increase in referrals and a number of complex deaths. Funding was received during the Covid pandemic to increase staffing in this area, but there were still pressures.
- Within the library service there had been recent pressures over the summer due to staff accrued annual leave and sickness. Temporary closures were a last resort but the situation has now improved.

The Chairman thanked officers and welcomed the report, and highlighted that this would be helpful to have as a regular update report to the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- i. That the Countryside, Culture and Communities Select Committee noted the current situation regarding recruitment and retention of staff in CCBS Services and the impact this is having on staff in post and on service delivery.
- ii. That the Countryside, Culture and Communities Select Committee supported the programme of activity and measures to improve recruitment and retention for services in the Department.

9. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee received the report of the Chief Executive which sets out the Committee's upcoming work programme (Item 9 in the Minute Book).

The Chairman asked whether the Committee were content to defer the following items earmarked for December – Hampshire Cultural Trust, Cultural Strategy and Update on Arts Council England, to allow for enough time for the pre-scrutiny of proposals for Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve at the December meeting. A vote was held and the Committee were unanimous in their agreement of this.

The Chairman also requested that a regular update item on Recruitment and Retention be included on the work programme, which the Committee were content with.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme was approved, with the amendments detailed above.

Chairman,