

<b>DECISION-MAKER:</b>	CABINET		
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	DISTRICT CENTRES SCRUTINY INQUIRY		
<b>DATE OF DECISION:</b>	15 MARCH 2010		
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	CHAIR OF THE ECONOMIC WELL BEING SCRUTINY PANEL		
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**STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

None

**SUMMARY**

From September 2009 to January 2010 the Economic Well Being Scrutiny Panel undertook an inquiry into Southampton's town and district centres. The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (OSMC) considered the final draft of the inquiry report on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2010 and approved it for submission to the Executive. The scrutiny inquiry report contains 19 recommendations which have been highlighted in Appendix 1. The Cabinet needs to formally respond to these recommendations within two months to meet the requirements in the Council's constitution.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- (i) To receive the attached inquiry report on Southampton's town and district centres to enable the Executive to formulate its response to the recommendations contained within it, in order to comply with the requirements set out in the Council's Constitution.

**REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The overview and scrutiny procedure rules in part 4 of the Council's Constitution requires the Executive to consider all inquiry reports that have been endorsed by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and to submit a formal response to the recommendations contained within them within two months of their receipt.

**CONSULTATION**

2. The Economic Well Being Scrutiny Panel received evidence from a variety of organisations, individuals and officers from Southampton City Council. A list of witnesses who provided evidence to the inquiry is shown within Appendix 2 of the Inquiry report.

**ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

3. None

**DETAIL**

4. Southampton's main city-wide planning document, the Core Strategy, identifies that Southampton has 1 town centre, Shirley, and 4 district centres,

Bitterne, Lordshill, Portswood and Woolston.

5. On 18<sup>th</sup> June 2009 the OSMC agreed the indicative terms of reference for a full inquiry examining Southampton's town and district centres. The Economic Well Being Scrutiny Panel undertook this Inquiry over 7 meetings between September 2009 and January 2010 and agreed, at its meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2010, 16 recommendations.
6. The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee considered the Scrutiny Panel's final report, attached at Appendix 2, at its meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2010. It resolved that the Economic Well Being Scrutiny Panel had met its terms of reference for the review and agreed that the inquiry report should be forwarded to the Cabinet to enable the Executive to formulate its response to the recommendations contained within it. In addition the OSMC inserted the following additional recommendations:
  - That the possibilities of splitting vacant shop premises within the district centres into a number of smaller retail units or work areas be investigated.
  - That an annual review of the health and potential of the district centres be undertaken and the results be presented to the OSMC as part of the State of the City report from the Leader.
  - That the Cabinet Member for Economic Development request that officers investigate an appropriate mechanism or forum for traders across the City to exchange ideas and best practice.

The Inquiry's 19 recommendations are summarised in Appendix 1.

7. Evidence gathered throughout the Inquiry has led the Scrutiny Panel to conclude that Southampton's town and district centres perform a valuable role as centres of retail, services and as a community focus, and whilst the Scrutiny Panel understand that the City Centre will be the focus for much of the planned development in the City, it is important that the town and district centres receive appropriate levels of support, investment and intervention in accordance with their specific needs, as identified by stakeholders, including local residents.
8. The 19 recommendations included within the report of the Economic Well Being Scrutiny Panel are designed to enhance the vitality and viability of Southampton's town and district centres. Whilst recognising that each recommendation within the report is important, the Scrutiny Panel identified the recommendations that relate to the following to be of highest priority:
  - improving the co-ordination and management of Southampton's town and district centres (Recommendation 1);
  - improving understanding of Southampton's town and district centres, and to actively promote growth and manage change (Recommendations 2 and 3), and;
  - supporting the vitality and viability of the centre that is in poorest health in Southampton, Woolston District Centre (Recommendations 10 – 14).

9. Members of the Economic Well Being Scrutiny Panel are aware that the Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Panel has undertaken an inquiry into Southampton's Night Time Economy, and that recommendations generated by the Night Time Economy inquiry may have implications for Southampton's town and district centres, where opportunities exist to develop the night time offering.
10. The Executive needs to consider the Scrutiny Panel's recommendations and to formally respond within two months of the date of receiving this report in order to meet the requirements set out in the Council's constitution.

## **FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

11. The Scrutiny Panel were of the opinion that a significant number of the recommendations within the appended report could be progressed by re-focussing council officer and partner's time and existing work programmes. A number of the recommendations may however, have financial implications for the Authority if approved by the Executive. These are:

### **Capital**

12. Recommendation 4 which recommends that the clarity of the car park signage is improved to ensure that shoppers are aware of the 5hr free parking available within the City Council's town and district centre car parks.
13. Recommendation 5 which recommends that to enhance access to the district centres, develop a sense of identity, and improve the attractiveness of district centres, extend the Legible Cities programme to the town and district centres and devise an approach to prioritise resources.
14. Recommendation 8 which recommends that Southampton City Council invests in the public realm to improve the appearance of Bitterne District Centre.
15. Recommendation 11 which recommends that signage within Woolston District Centre is improved to raise awareness of available car parking provision within the District Centre.
16. Recommendation 14 which recommends that building upon work undertaken by Swaythling Housing Society, a vision for Woolston District Centre is developed, in conjunction with traders and local community groups that identifies how Woolston District Centre can be revitalised, and funding is sought to deliver the vision.

### **Revenue**

17. Recommendation 1 which recommends that using Portsmouth's model, appoint a District Centres Co-ordinator.
18. It will be for the Executive to identify whether they can accommodate taking forward any of the recommendations outlined in Appendix 1 within agreed budgets. Precise revenue implications will depend on:
  - a) How the individual recommendations are implemented
  - b) The level of external funding that can be generated, if this is considered to be necessary.

19. The Economic Well Being Scrutiny Panel have been informed of potential external funding sources that could be utilised to support the implementation of the draft recommendations. These include:
- **Local Transport Plan 3** - A goal to be addressed by the strategy is to support economic growth. Incorporated within this goal is the challenge to improve the street scene environment in the City and District Centres.
  - **Local Authority Business Growth Initiative (LABGI)** – The Economic Well Being Scrutiny Panel have been informed that Southampton City Council is likely to receive between £200k-£400k from the Government in LABGI funding in 2010/11. Portsmouth City Council use LABGI funding to part fund the District Centres Co-ordinator's post.
  - **Empty Shop Funding** - Southampton City Council was awarded £52,632 in December 2009 from the Department for Communities and Local Government to make sure that town and district centres remain vibrant places, and to help councils find new uses for vacant premises.

### **Property**

20. The appointment of a District Centres Co-ordinator outlined in recommendation 1 of the inquiry report could involve the creation of an additional post which would need to be located within the Council's existing office accommodation.

### **Other**

21. None

### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:**

22. The duty to undertake overview and scrutiny is set out in Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

#### **Other Legal Implications:**

23. None

### **POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS**

24. The proposals contained within the appended report are in accordance with the Council's Policy Framework and, if implemented, the recommendations will, amongst others, help to deliver policies within the Core Strategy (Policy CS3), objectives within Local Transport Plan 2, and goals identified for Local Transport Plan 3.

## SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

### Appendices

1.	District Centres Inquiry - Summary of Recommendations
2.	District Centres Inquiry - Final report of the Economic Well Being Scrutiny Panel

### Documents In Members' Rooms

	None
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### Background Documents

Title of Background Paper(s)

Relevant Paragraph of the Access to Information Procedure Rules / Schedule 12A allowing document to be Exempt/Confidential (if applicable)

1.	None	
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### Background documents available for inspection at:

**FORWARD PLAN No:** Not applicable **KEY DECISION?** No

<b>WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:</b>	Not applicable
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