

LOCAL GOVERNMENT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME (LGIP)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council has been participating in the above programme which consists of three peer review visits and reports.
- 1.2 The first two of these visits have already taken place and the third and final visit is scheduled for Wednesday 17 April 2002.
- 1.3 This report seeks to raise awareness of
 - the event;
 - the work that needs to be done in advance; and
 - the current state of play of the Council's performance against the recommendations of the LGIP report.

2. THE THIRD REVIEW VISIT

- #
- 2.1 Attached at Appendix 1 is a copy of the guidance notes issued by the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA) in respect of the third visit.
 - 2.2 The single day event is seen as an important part of the overall programme and as such needs to involve a large number of people (approx 40 - 60).
 - 2.3 It can be seen that the basic structure is a workshop (now scheduled for 2 –3 hours) involving representatives from the following groups:
 - Front line employees
 - Middle managers
 - Senior managers
 - Members
 - External partners
 - 2.4 All parties have been invited to attend.
 - 2.5 The whole event will be held at the Town Hall, Lymington.
 - 2.6 The draft programme is as follows:

0830 – 1015	Interviews with: Leader of the Council, Leader of the Liberal Democrats and the Chief Executive
1030 – 1330	Workshop for Council stakeholders ie Members, employees and partners
1330 – 14.00	Lunch
1400 – 1500	Interviews, including Review Panel Chairmen
1530 – 1600	Feedback

3. THE LGIP REPORTS FROM THE FIRST TWO VISITS

- 3.1 Following its visit in June 2000, the Peer Review Team issued a report on the Council's performance against the benchmark of the 'ideal' local authority.
- # 3.2 That report set out recommendations and a copy of those are attached at Appendix 2. Incorporated into this appendix is the latest draft assessment of the Council's position against the recommendations.
- 3.3 **Members are asked to input into this assessment** which can form the basis of papers being made available to the Review Team prior to their visit.
- 3.4 The third visit will review progress against the recommendations of the original report. **Members are asked to consider which three key achievements against the recommendations should be highlighted. Three outstanding areas for improvement should also be recognised and barriers identified that have got in the way of making progress in these areas.** Initial suggestions, following management team discussions, are as follows:
- a) Key achievements**
- Council leadership in developing the Local Strategic Partnership
 - Streamlining of the Best Value process without loss of rigour
 - Substantial delivery of electronic governance targets
- b) Areas of improvement**
- Need for clearer priorities in medium term financial strategy
 - Further development of the scrutiny process
 - Further improvements in internal and external communication.
- # 3.5 A progress report was issued by the I&DeA following the second visit (July 2001) and a copy is attached at Appendix 3.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The financial cost of participating in the LGIP is the fee of £15,000 paid to the I&DeA. This covers all three visits and reports.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no significant environmental implications arising from this report.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The LGIP has encouraged the Council to assess itself against the benchmark of an 'ideal' local authority and has provided an external view on the Council's overall performance.
- 7.2 The Council's early participation in this programme is seen by audit and inspection as a positive step to take.
- 7.3 It has provided the impetus for the Council to move forward in certain areas and will help the Council in its future Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) which is likely to take place in the Autumn of 2003.

8. RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 That Cabinet agree the arrangements for the final visit of the LGIP team and approve with any amendments with any amendments, the latest assessment of progress against the Team's earlier recommendations.

For further information

Keith Smith
Corporate Planning Co-ordinator
Appletree Court
Lyndhurst
Tel: 023 8028 5551
Fax: 023 8028 5366
Email: keith.smith@nfdc.gov.uk

Local Government Improvement Programme

Final Progress Review Visit

This document is designed to provide details of the objectives, programme and arrangements that will be required for the final progress review visit. Answers to likely questions are provided. However the peer review manager will be able to provide further details and will negotiate final arrangements.

What is the purpose of the visit?

The visit will:

- review progress against the recommendations of the original peer review report
- assess current performance against the benchmark of the “ideal” local authority

In addition the workshop which will be held will offer the authority a model for considering and measuring performance which could be replicated again in the future.

When will the visit take place?

The visit should take place between 18-24 months after the original peer review. However the appropriate timing and exact date will be subject to negotiation and will take into account local circumstances and need.

What will the programme include?

The visit will last one day and will include:

- individual interviews with, as a minimum, group leaders and the chief executive
- an all day workshop attended by about 60 participants, which will include staff at all levels, members, partners and local residents

Who will attend?

The team will include a peer review manager (where possible the original one) as well as up to four members of the original review team.

Will we need to provide any documentation in advance?

It will be useful for the team to be provided with:

- a copy of the improvement plan together with the latest monitoring report
- a list of the 3 key achievements against the recommendations, and the 3 outstanding areas for improvement and what hindered progress

What resources will be needed on the day?

The venue for the workshop will need to be large enough to accommodate a large group of about 60 people. As they will be working in groups it will need to be able to be arranged cabaret style with about ten tables and/or include a number of additional break out rooms/spaces for small group discussions. Wall space or panel boards will also be needed on which to stick flip charts and other similar materials.

In addition although the review team members will lead the workshop, about eight additional facilitators will need to be provided the council. They could be, will be required. They will be fully briefed by the review team, probably the evening before the visit.

Arrangements for the individual interviews will also need to be agreed.

Who will invite workshop participants?

The council will need to arrange for representatives of the following groups to be invited:

- front line staff (preferably including those who attended the original staff workshops)
- middle managers (as above)
- senior management team
- members
- external partners (eg: health, police, parishes)
- residents (may include representatives of residents associations, citizens panel, neighbourhood forums, etc)

As one of the sessions will include discussions in the above groupings, at least five people from each group will be required.

What feedback will we be given?

Feedback will include:

- initial verbal feedback to the Chief Executive and Leader/s at the end of the day
- a written report that will include feedback on progress towards the recommendations as well as an assessment of current performance against the fifteen benchmark competencies, based on information generated at the workshop.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

APPENDIX 2

IMPROVEMENT PLAN

1 VISION - To ensure a clear vision and corporate objectives that reflect the priorities of the new Conservative administration, there is a need to:

Recommendation	Action June 2000 – July 2001	Action July 2001 – April 2002	Future proposals
1a Review the corporate planning process to ensure it is member, not officer driven	New political structure has helped focus attention on what the Cabinet wishes to achieve. This has helped to lead the Council set out its overall objectives in the new Corporate Plan. Portfolio appointments have given sense of ownership of their services.	All Members consulted on the Corporate Plan as part of its review. Portfolio Holders set key targets (via Cabinet) in consultation with Review Panels.	Cabinet to consider responses to consultation from stakeholders before deciding on final plan.
1b Produce an up to date vision and priority statement, developed in consultation with internal stakeholder groups	New corporate plan approved, generated by the Leading Group (Cabinet) and structured to tie in with the future direction of local government. Aimed at specific actions for achievement in the year ahead.	Plan used as a consultation document for employees and partners to input into future direction and budget strategy. The new Corporate Plan “The Heart of the Forest” used as this Council’s input into the draft issues paper for the Community Strategy being progressed through the Local Strategic Partnership.	Cabinet to consider responses to consultation from stakeholders before deciding on final plan.
1c Develop a budget strategy that is directed towards the achievement of corporate objectives	Best Value review process challenges achievement of corporate objectives and provides timetable guidance to fit in with budget process. Final reports identify action under Improvement Plan where additional resources are required to comply with action identified for improvement. New financial strategy and new budgetary process should improve consideration of new policy initiatives and savings to tie in with corporate objectives.	Best Value Guide reinforces the need to time reports to fit in with budget process. Medium term financial strategy developed.	Keep all processes under review.

Recommendation	Action June 2000 – July 2001	Action July 2001 – April 2002	Future proposals
1d Develop clear strategies to achieve priorities which include outcome and output measures	Greater emphasis placed generally on outcome and output measures through Best Value, strategy development and action planning.	Strategies produced in line with recommendation eg E Governance and Housing.	
1e Establish a system to regularly monitor progress towards the achievement of priorities	Quality of Life PI's approved to be used to monitor progress towards the achievement of priorities. Reported on how the Council fared against its key targets in the BVPP. The BVPP was structured into Portfolios to assist with the monitoring of performance against key areas.	Internal service planning and performance management workshops arranged.	Make more use of Review Panels to monitor progress as part of the overall approach.
1f Ensure links with the communications strategy	New corporate plan clearly sets out what the Council wishes to achieve.	New corporate plan being used as a key communication tool to promote the Council's objectives both internally and externally.	

2 CORPORATE MANAGEMENT TEAM - To ensure CMT works together as a team with joint responsibility for the achievement of corporate priorities:

Recommendation	Action June 2000 – July 2001	Action July 2001 – April 2002	Future proposals
2a Consideration should be given to commissioning external support to assist in building the team into a corporate unit.	<p>Ensured each Director has responsibility for specific strategic issues.</p> <p>Agendas more focused on strategy items. Specific Strategy Away Days held each month in addition to weekly meetings. Key strategic issues identified.</p> <p>Forward planning of future strategy items included on each agenda.</p> <p>Changed name to Corporate Management Team.</p> <p>Regular opportunities for CMT and the Cabinet to discuss issues.</p>	<p>Development opportunities organised for Senior Managers to examine strategic issues.</p> <p>Strategic meetings held between CMT, the Cabinet and Senior Managers.</p>	

3 CHANGE MANAGEMENT - To reduce uncertainty and raise staff morale:

Recommendation	Action June 2000 – July 2001	Action July 2001 – April 2002	Future proposals
3a A change programme needs to be agreed, which clearly states what is to be achieved together with key dates for completion.	<p>Chief Executive and Leader held employee meetings to explain change.</p> <p>There has been an excellent response by employees to the many changes coming through, in particular as part of the modernising agenda. In particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New decision making structures Best Value Community Strategy Development <p>This is wholly consistent with the culture at NFDC</p> <p>Period of stability achieved through clearer political direction and new ways of working being developed through involvement of employees and Employee Side representatives.</p>		

Recommendation	Action June 2000 – July 2001	Action July 2001 – April 2002	Future proposals
3b A project management approach needs to be adopted for all changes to ensure they are adequately resourced, monitored and evaluated.	Many examples of project management eg Electronic Governance, CCTV, Hampshire Network, FMIS, Pay and Reward Strategy. Project Management course held. Applied PRINCE principles in some cases.	As before	Opportunities to be taken through Senior Management development eg projects management

4 BEST VALUE - The best value programme needs to be reviewed to:

Recommendation	Action June 2000 – July 2001	Action July 2001 – April 2002	Future proposals
4a Ensure the review process is not overly bureaucratic and complicated and includes a robust challenge element.	Challenge element strengthened significantly in revised process and then further through later revisions. Real challenge early in review process through Member input (Portfolio and Scrutiny). Final report model addresses all alternative delivery options as well as challenging existing policies that get in the way of delivering best value.	Effectiveness of Best Value process reviewed. Best Value Guide issued to all services setting out pre review activity, planning a review project, undertaking the 4 C's in a Best Value review, writing the final reports and the reporting process. A streamlined independent verification/challenge element to the reviews has also been adopted along with minimised reporting and documentation. Clarification of a flexible approach to Best Value had been highlighted encouraging services to consider a more appropriate Best Value review to the issues within their service through a light touch review. Services are being given the option of not undertaking a review where the issues or Best Value activity can justify this approach.	Keep under review.

Recommendation	Action June 2000 – July 2001	Action July 2001 – April 2002	Future proposals
4b Agree challenge and competition strategies.	Policies and processes developed for all the 4C's.	Kept under review and integrated into the Best Value Guide.	Keep under review and update Best Value Guide as appropriate.
4c Develop a realistic and achievable review programme which avoids reviews of large numbers of small discrete services in favour of more broad ranging, including cross-cutting reviews	The number of Best Value reviews has been reduced from 87 to 46.	Further opportunities taken to reduce number of packages. New streamlining proposals will reduce the number of reviews going through a detailed Best Value review in a given year. At the scoping stage services are required to consider whether their review could link better with others and whether there are any partnership/joint working opportunities or elements.	Continue to encourage services to look at more issues based/appropriate reviews.
4d Involve a greater number of external and independent people in the review process.	Services encouraged to involve external experts in their review. The verification teams make up includes an external verifier. Additional inputs achieved through strong emphasis on stakeholder involvement including regular use of Citizens' Panel by services undertaking reviews.	Development of the Review Boards maintain the previous external and independent element of verification but provides for much earlier involvement to help shape the review. Consultation and involvement of people outside of the service has been emphasised in the Best Value Guide.	

Recommendation	Action June 2000 – July 2001	Action July 2001 – April 2002	Future proposals
4e Ensure Best Value is member driven.	New Best Value process and Council's Constitution provides real role for scrutiny in Best Value. Best Value Lead Scrutiny members appointed well in advance for each review to work as part of member/officer teams. Scrutiny Panels have opportunities to input into each review at both early planning stage and brainstorming new ways of working later in the process. This is in addition to the normal call in procedures.	Monitored added value that scrutiny brings and reviewed key issues such as timings, level and format of involvement. Also considered impact that scrutiny involvement in Best Value has had in identifying policies requiring review. This has helped shape the streamlining of the Best Value process. The relevant Portfolio Holder and shadow plays a direct part of the review Team. The expected outcomes and key challenges are reported by Review Panels at the scoping stage of the review to assess member priorities and encourage Member ownership and involvement.	A Member training programme will involve an element of Best Value issues.
4f Recognise the wider potential of benchmarking to provide opportunities to learn from the best in both the public and private sectors.	The Best Value Inspector acknowledged the good work undertaken with the private sector as part of the Tourism and Recreation Centre reviews.	The Best Value Guide is very clear in terms of its requirement for services to develop and collate local performance indicators based on DTLR dimensions, and benchmark with the best and similar providers. This also links in better with the compete element of reviews.	We need to continue to see how well services progress with benchmarking opportunities. Provide greater encouragement for pre-review benchmarking.

5 DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION - To ensure active and effective democratic representation:

Recommendation	Action June 2000 – July 2001	Action July 2001 – April 2002	Future proposals
5a Ensure adequate and appropriate support is provided to the new structures, including the scrutiny process.	Incoming sessions on new structures held for Members and officers. Briefings on new procedures held for Departmental Management Teams. Democratic Services support allocated to Cabinet, Committees and Panels. Pilot scheme introduced and operated.	Cross-directorate support provided to Panels. Directors took lead on Panels in initial stages. Support given throughout the process	Regular meetings of Scrutiny Panel chairmen proposed. Panels informal workshop sessions to continue. Monthly briefings for all Members of the Council on topical matters

Recommendation	Action June 2000 – July 2001	Action July 2001 – April 2002	Future proposals
5b Identify the likely effects on officer roles and implement any changes indicated.	Training provided for key officers in a variety of subjects including New Political Structures.	Further in depth training on new political structures and roles. Management Development Programme 2001. Review of workload on Democratic Service Section reported to Corporate and Finance Review Panel January 2001.	Continue to monitor as scrutiny role develops.
5c Review scrutiny proposals to ensure it is a robust and challenging process and has the freedom to set its own work programme.		Seminars for all Members, particularly on scrutiny role, held in October. Each Panel has followed with a series of workshops to identify their work programme and priorities.	Continue to support scrutiny function and encourage meaningful work programmes.
5d Consider the re-introduction of area structures which ensure the needs of local communities are identified through members taking a leading and active local role.	No formal area structures proposed for decision making but various area based initiatives identified for future work with partners. Met with Parish Councils in their part of the District to discuss community planning and what it might mean for locality working. General encouragement of locality based needs assessments with our partners. 3 PNA's completed. Recreation centre consultative arrangements modernised to provide for regular focus group approach and annual Stakeholders' Forum.	Needs assessment is seen as a key part of the Local Strategic Partnership and is embedded into its terms of reference and developing action plan. Promoted the use of such initiatives as Participatory Needs Assessments and Village Plans with key partners. Areas for early work currently being discussed and local members with parish councils to be heavily involved.	Develop local representative role to achieve real inputs into : Cabinet decision making Community Strategy work
5e Develop a strategy to increase electoral turnout and registration.	Monitored pilot voting schemes. Awaiting legislation on rolling registration.	Rolling registration introduced. Registration forms sent to all new occupiers, as notified by Council Tax.	Monitor closely effect of pilot voting schemes at 2002 local elections. Develop protocols for e-voting (see E Governance work programme). Consider submitting proposals to run pilot voting scheme in May 2003.

6 COMMUNICATION - To ensure the community receives adequate information and is made aware of the council's priorities and achievements:

Recommendation	Action June 2000 – July 2001	Action July 2001 – April 2002	Future proposals
6a Agree a communication strategy which is pro-active in highlighting the council's priorities and progress made with their achievements.	Considerable effort in this period to raise the profile of the work of the Council. This was achieved through productively promoting both the role of Members in the new democratic system of Local Government and through personalisation with and keeping the citizens of the New Forest informed of developments.	In this period consideration given to formal communication strategies which will position the Council ready for its co-ordination role within the local strategic partnership and other partnerships which are being forged for the benefit of the citizens of the Forest.	Introduction of a formal internet communications strategy from which will form our external communications strategy linking with consultation and customer strategies.
6b Keeps the community informed of controversial issues	Brought together partner agencies to work towards a community newspaper.	Community newspaper introduced bringing together information from all the agencies serving the people of New Forest.	Partners contributing financially to the production of the paper. Scope of the paper to be increased. Consideration being given to editorialization. Particularly when LSP begins to impact on communities.
6c Review adequacy of current publicity material and take steps to meet shortfalls	Put into train recommendations of the Public Relations BV Review action plan – vis a vis considering innovative ways of getting publicity material in to a range of mechanisms.	More corporate public/media relations now undertaken. Ensuring news and information generation by the Council finds a place in the appropriate sections of the media.	Introduce a daily electronic newspaper with its own website address. More use of electronic media including broad band/digital broadcasting when available.
6d Take actions required to improve internal communication, especially at frontline level.	Minutes being produced of availability of Corporate groups meetings and made available on the Intranet. Intranet further developed.	Internal cyber magazine introduced to inform employees of developments within the Council. Introduction of Paperwork (Policy newspaper) to keep employees informed of policy and current issues affecting the whole of the Council.	Communication Strategy to be developed which will enhance internal communication which links to outcomes of the 2001/2002 stress audit.

7 PLANNING - To ensure strategy development is efficient and avoids overlap:

Recommendation	Action June 2000 – July 2001	Action July 2001 – April 2002	Future proposals
7a Consideration should be given to conducting an audit of all current plans to identify areas of overlap.	Included in early drafts of the terms of reference of the LSP. Initial list identified.	Key part of the LSP work. Strategies across agencies being used to arrive at draft issues for the community strategy. These will be tested further at stakeholder events. Internal service planning and performance management workshops arranged.	
7b A new streamlined and integrated process is developed to ensure linkages and maximises opportunities for co-ordinated implementation and monitoring, possibly under the umbrella of a community planning process.	Included in early drafts of the term of reference of the LSP.	Key part of the LSP work. Strategies across agencies being used to arrive at draft issues for the community strategy. The development of the Community Action Team (CAT) and the Community Action Networks (CANs) are seen as positive steps. Three CANs currently being piloted.	Review the CAN process in the light of the three pilots (July 2002)
7c Ensure all plans have SMART targets.	Best Value has helped focus attention on this area.	Clear action plans with measurable targets produced wherever possible. Internal service planning and performance management workshops arranged.	

Recommendation	Action June 2000 – July 2001	Action July 2001 – April 2002	Future proposals
7d Focus on the monitoring and evaluation of outputs and outcomes.	Greater emphasis placed generally on outcome and output measures through Best Value, strategy development and action planning.	Strategies produced in line with recommendation eg E Governance and Housing.	

8 PEOPLE MANAGEMENT - To enhance the quality of the workforce:

Recommendation	Action June 2000 – July 2001	Action July 2001 – April 2002	Future proposals
8a Ensure consistent application of the PDI process across the whole organisation.	Surveys have been carried out. Directors have restated their commitment to PDI's. All Heads of Service given an opportunity to input into the make up of the PDI form. Training offered to interviewers and interviewees. Communication from Chief Executive to all Directors to ensure all PDI's take place.	New PDI process developed based on competencies. Introduced on basis of five pilot competencies Training given to all employees including managers.	Recognise there needs to be continual action to reinforce the importance of the PDI process. Reviews on process and delivery will be considered by CMT following this years experience.
8b Establish a monitoring system to ensure the process and implementation of actions agreed as a result of the process.	Issues such as training needs continue to be identified through the PDI process.	Training Co-ordinators continued to encourage managers to complete training needs forms and for training needs to be met. Introduced new PDI process initially based of 5 pilot competencies.	Linking competencies with PDIs will help identify training needs and consequently improve access. Develop further through team training plans.

Recommendation	Action June 2000 – July 2001	Action July 2001 – April 2002	Future proposals
8c Review the current level of IT provision and ensure all staff have adequate, appropriate and reliable equipment to perform their job.	IT improved in frontline areas eg information offices. Substantial preparatory work undertaken on new telephone system. Teletalk installed at some of the Council's offices.	Recreation Centres and Local Information Offices upgraded software. Recreation Centres IT Improvements made. Significant spending on IT Strategy.	
8d Ensure that the recruitment policy is adhered to and as far as possible all posts are advertised internally and externally.	All posts advertised in accordance with approved procedures.	Monitored	Continue to monitor. E-recruitment.

9 PARTNERSHIPS - To streamline partnership activity, avoid duplication, and maximise the benefits of partnership activity:

Recommendation	Action June 2000 – July 2001	Action July 2001 – April 2002	Future proposals
9a Consideration should be given to the formation of an over-arching partnership board to oversee and co-ordinate all partnership activity.	Workshops held involving Members, Heads of Service, and partner agencies including three meetings with groups of Parish Councils. Internal officer group and multi Agency Community Strategy Group set up to establish New Forest District LSP. Reports to Cabinet and Policy and Resources Committee on Community Strategy development and the new power of well being. Joint workshop with Hampshire County Council held to establish how both Councils can best meet statutory duty. Public awareness raised of role and concept of LSP/community planning working through Forest News and Best Value Performance Plan.	Leading the co-ordination of the work of the LSP and developed Community Action Team (CAT) and Community Action Networks (CANs) concepts into reality. This will back up the LSP in its work and make agencies work more efficiently and effectively for the benefit of communities. First two meetings of LSP held. Good positive feedback from partners including GOSE.	The District's first community strategy to be published April 2003. Review the CAN process in the light of the three pilots (July 2002)
Recommendation	Action June 2000 – July 2001	Action July 2001 – April 2002	Future proposals

<p>9b Widen the number of officers involved in partnerships to maximise networking opportunities and reduce the potential over dependence on a small number of senior officers.</p>	<p>Series of Heads of Service workshops held with Members on corporate issues including LSP/community strategy development. Increased number of corporate officer groups including key partnership issues of Crime Prevention, Health and Community Strategy. Best Value Cross Cutting reviews have provided some impetus for closer working with agencies towards common goals. Senior Management Development introduced to provide topic based discussions on corporate/strategic issues which help partnership working.</p>	<p>Completed the Management Development Programme for 2001/02. Partnership Master Class held. Continued the developing trend towards more multi-disciplinary teams involving partnerships. Three CAN's being piloted. Creating more effective networks of issue based co-ordinators from a variety of agencies. NFDC's three CAN co-ordinators to date are middle managers.</p>	
<p>9c Identify additional partners who could assist in achieving council priorities and projects.</p>	<p>Initiated discussions with Business Sector regarding formation of Business Forum in the District.</p>	<p>The partnership challenge contained in the LSP terms of reference will, through the development of CANs, review whether all players who have something to contribute to the issue have the appropriate opportunity to be involved.</p>	

10 CONSULTATION - To enhance the effectiveness of consultation and avoid “consultation fatigue”:

Recommendation	Action June 2000 – July 2001	Action July 2001 – April 2002	Future proposals
<p>10a A process of co-ordinating consultation, internally and externally with partner agencies, needs to be developed.</p>	<p>New consultation policy and process provides for centralised awareness of consultation initiatives to avoid duplication of effort and to share results across departments and with other agencies.</p>	<p>Post of Corporate Consultations Officer established to help identify opportunities for co-ordinating consultation. LSP and CAT terms of reference include the sharing of consultation and feedback. Lists of consultation undertaken and planned across LSP agencies established.</p>	<p>LSP database to be established.</p>

Recommendation	Action June 2000 – July 2001	Action July 2001 – April 2002	Future proposals
10b A range of methods should be employed, including those which facilitates active participation.	<p>Increased number of Citizens' Panel to 2000. Group from the Panel recruited to attend Citizen focus days to work with services on relevant issues.</p> <p>Democracy week in 2000 saw the Council in 5 town centres informing the public of options for new political structures and obtaining feedback. Some street surveys undertaken on town centre issues.</p> <p>Worked with the Health Authority on Participatory Needs Assessments in three localities in the District.</p> <p>Recreation Centre Consultative arrangements changed to provide for regular focus group approach and annual Stakeholder Forum.</p>	<p>Participatory Needs Assessment seen as a major element of the work of the LSP, at a locality level.</p> <p>Electronic Governance work programme expanded to include Consultation and Local Democracy. Development opportunities given through Senior Management Training.</p>	<p>Further initiatives to be developed as part of the Community Planning process.</p>

11 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES - To ensure all policy decisions take into account any equal opportunity implications.

Recommendation	Action June 2000 – July 2001	Action July 2001 – April 2002	Future proposals
11a Consideration should be given to a section on equal opportunity implications being included in all committee reports.		<p>Working group set up to consider Race Relations Amendment Act.</p>	<p>Race Equality Scheme will be produced which will involve assessing all services for their impact on race equality.</p> <p>Training will be given to policy makers on the implications of the Race Relations Amendment Act.</p> <p>Consideration to be given to how best to co-ordinate all equalities issues and ensure the council works towards the new equalities standard.</p>

Follow up Report: New Forest District Council

Local Government Improvement Programme

Progress review visit to New Forest District Council

Introduction

1. The peer review of the council took place in the week of 12-16 June March 2000.
2. The objective of the progress review visit is to provide an opportunity for the council to receive objective feedback on the progress being made in relation to the recommendations proposed by the review team, and assistance in identifying areas requiring further action.
3. The progress review visit of New Forest District Council which took place on 10 July, 2001, was undertaken by Adele Wilter, Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) Peer Review Manager and Carmel Gallagher, IDeA Consultant (Management Development), both members of the original review team.

Progress review programme

4. The programme included:
 - Individual interviews with:
Dave Yates, Chief Executive
Cllr Simon Hayes, Leader (Conservatives)
Cllr Maureen Robinson, Opposition Leader (Liberal Democrats)
 - a discussion with representatives of the Corporate Management Team (CMT)
 - a workshop attended by nearly twenty participants, including councillors, senior and middle managers and frontline staff. Many had attended the workshops or been interviewed during the original review.

Development of the Improvement Plan

5. Following the review, the report was considered by a variety of groups in the council, who reflected on the conclusions and expressed views on the extent to which they agreed with them from their own experience and perspective.
6. These views were in turn considered by the cabinet..
7. In February 2001 a workshop involving a cross section of staff and members was held at which suggestions for actions were made.
8. In July 200 1, shortly before the first progress review visit, a report was submitted to the advisory Cabinet and Policy and Resources Committee, updating members on actions taken and further actions planned in response to the key areas identified for improvement by the review team.

Progress made

9. The peer review took place at the end of a period of instability for the council. A recent change in political control, from Liberal Democrat to Conservative, and the departure of a long standing chief executive and the appointment of a new one, had resulted in a period of uncertainty for everyone in the council. Changes were being considered or imminent with the consequent lowering of staff morale.
10. Over the past year stability appears to have returned. Both the political and managerial leadership have developed a positive reputation and demonstrated their ability to lead and support the council in facing up to and implementing the modernisation agenda. In particular, the new political structures introduced on a pilot basis in November 2000 are already considered to be making a positive contribution to the operation of the council.
11. In the course of a one-day programme it is not possible to examine in-depth all the areas contained in the original review report. Attempts were therefore made to gain feedback on the key issues highlighted for improvement. The information compiled from interviews and the workshop, as well as the written material made available, are presented below, against some of the original recommendation headings. In addition, Appendix A contains copies of the continuums produced in the workshop.

Vision

12. A new corporate plan '*The Heart of the Forest*' was agreed in April 2001. It reflects the priorities of the Conservative administration and takes account of the new power to promote the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the area. While it is similar to the previous corporate plan, it contains a greater recognition of the need to both protect the natural environment at the same time as promoting the economy of the area, a potentially conflicting challenge commented upon by the review team.
13. Further evidence of a renewed commitment to economic development is demonstrated by the production of a new economic strategy, which includes plans for the development of a business forum and the establishment of a combined cabinet portfolio for economy and planning.

Officer Management Team

14. The Officer Management Team has been renamed the Corporate Management Team to reflect the recognition of the need to act more as a corporate group at a strategic level. There appears general agreement across the council that the group has become a more effective team. Regular away day sessions are helping to ensure that sufficient time is devoted to considering key strategic issues, such as performance management.
15. Good working relationships have also developed between the CMT and the Cabinet, facilitated, for example, by a joint away day session.

Change Management

16. Although a formal change programme has not been introduced, changes are being introduced or considered wherever there are indications that improvements can be made. For example, negotiations are currently underway with a neighbouring authority to establish a joint Direct Services Organisation (DSO) in order to achieve both economies of scale and the provision of high quality services.
17. Workshop participants were in general agreement that over the past year staff morale has improved.

Best Value

18. Although the Council's early reviews had been successful with awards of "two stars and improving" to tourism and recreation, there was recognition of the need to streamline the Best Value process.
19. Several fundamental changes have been made to the Best Value programme. The review methodology has been revised to reduce bureaucracy, increase member involvement, and to ensure greater challenge, through the inclusion of external, independent representatives on review teams.
20. High level corporate commitment to Best Value is being demonstrated by the inclusion of Best Value in the leader's portfolio, and in the appointment of the director of finance as chair of the Best Value corporate project team.
21. While the Cabinet agrees the initial scope of each review and the final recommendations, the new Review (scrutiny) Panels debate the recommendations prior to their submission to the Cabinet.
22. Although the number of reviews has been reduced from 87 to 46 this is still a relatively high number, which will be both resource intensive and may also limit opportunities to identify and consider innovative improvements which could flow from larger and more crosscutting reviews.
23. Workshop participants, while generally committed to the concept of Best Value, were still concerned over the balance between savings and real improvements to services and the cost of resources that is still being devoted to the process.

Democratic Representation

24. In addition to the Cabinet, which consists of the leader and seven members, six review Panels have been established, to perform a scrutiny role. Each is linked to one or two Cabinet portfolios.
25. All chairs and vice chairs are held by administration members. While this is not illegal, developing good practice points to the value of offering some chairs to opposition members to ensure both a spirit of inclusion and to ensure the robustness of the scrutiny process.
26. In line with the experience of other local authorities, scrutiny members are finding this new role challenging and there is a general recognition that there is some way to go before it becomes truly effective. However, to ensure progress is made, performance is under review and changes will be introduced in the light of experience.

27. Members who participated in the workshop expressed some dissatisfaction with the amount of information officers were providing for them. This, together with the fact that reporting systems have not been altered since the introduction of the new political structures, indicates a need to review not only reporting mechanisms but officer support systems, as recommended in the review report.
28. The administration does not currently favour any imposition of area structures but would prefer to strengthen relations with, town and parish councils to ensure local views are heard and their needs met.

Communication

29. Workshop participants had mixed views in regard to the extent of improvement of internal and external communication. Internally, it was suggested that communication with outlying centres still needs some attention. Externally, while it is acknowledged that the quality of press releases and general information provided to the public has improved, it is felt there is still room for improvement in engaging in a two-way dialogue with the public. Overall, however, it was agreed that progress is being made.

Planning

30. The CMT has recognised the need to align all plans, including ensuring links between the new corporate plan, and service and business plans, as well as linking financial planning with the corporate priorities. It is envisaged that when the work is complete, guidelines will be produced to ensure a degree of consistency across the council.

People Management

31. The importance of the Personal Development Interview (PDI) process continues to be recognised and efforts are being made to ensure managers comply with the guidance. In order to ensure it remains relevant and valued, it is currently being reviewed with plans being made to develop a competency based approach to appraisal and personal development.

Partnerships

32. Work is progressing on the formation of a Local Strategic Partnership, which is expected to be launched in the autumn. A steering group of key partner agencies has been meeting on a regular basis to agree the process and future method of operation. The coterminosity of both health and police boundaries is proving particularly helpful.

Adele Wilter
Review Manager
Improvement and Development Agency

10.07.01

Conclusions and Recommendations

33. There is clear evidence that New Forest District Council is making good progress on many of the areas identified by the review team. Relationships amongst members and officers within the council appear relaxed, open, honest and constructive. There is a clear willingness to recognise areas requiring attention and to introduce changes where indicated.
34. Like all authorities, there is a large agenda to be tackled if it is to become a truly effective authority providing high quality services and taking on the role as a community leader. However, building on the sound foundation which has now been laid down, and exploiting the range of skills and commitment of both staff and members, this is achievable.
35. While there is no indication that any additional recommendations need to be made, it is suggested that the following issues continue to receive attention:
 - ensure a performance management system is put in place, which ensures that all plans, including a future community plan, are aligned, that all contain SMART targets, and that review systems are put in place so that progress can be monitored and achievements recognised
 - continue to streamline and refine the Best Value process to ensure that it achieves its ultimate purpose of ensuring that services are provided in the most effective and efficient manner
 - consider reviewing the current allocation of scrutiny chairs
 - ensure that the new corporate plan is widely disseminated internally and externally