



THE COUNCIL'S IMPROVEMENT PLAN

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Key features of an 'excellent and improving' authority include learning from experience and being able to focus on what it wants to improve on.
- 1.2 The production of an Improvement Plan for the Council is an expression of these key features.
- 1.3 This report sets out the progress against the various areas for improvement as contained within the Council's Improvement Plan. That progress forms part of the Direction of Travel Assessment being undertaken by the Audit Commission.
- # 1.4 A copy of the updated Improvement Plan is attached as the Appendix.

2. DEVELOPING THE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

- 2.1 The Improvement Plan was formally approved by Members on 5 July 2004 following the CPA process.
- 2.2 Improvement planning is an important aspect for any successful organization. The Improvement Plan does not stand still and it needs to develop as new key challenges present themselves. Members' role in this development is crucial.
- 2.3 The Improvement Plan is updated and reviewed on a regular basis and acts as a focus for key corporate improvement issues facing the authority. It needs to work in harmony with the four-year Corporate Plan and the annual Performance Plan which remain the key corporate planning documents of the authority.
- 2.4 Since the last report in July 2005 the following main changes have been made to the areas for improvement:
 - The merging of the activities around the Community Strategy
 - The inclusion of working in partnership with other bodies to achieve Local Area Agreement and Local Public Service Agreement 2 targets
 - Moving from launching and promoting the Heart of the Forest to reviewing the Heart of the Forest
- 2.5 As part of the development process it is important to consider whether any areas of improvement activity have been progressed sufficiently or completed to result in it being moved out of the Improvement Plan. This does not mean that the areas are not important merely that there is no major improvement activity needed at this stage. Potential areas for deletion from the Plan are:

- 7d – Improve the medium term financial strategy through better alignment of strategic, financial and workforce planning
- 8 – Finalise the Risk Management Strategy
- 12a – Agree Homelessness Strategy
- 19b – Agreeing a compact with the voluntary sector
- 21 – Developing this Improvement Plan and ensure it is delivered

- 2.6 There is the potential to include new areas of improvement activity. Issues to consider might include:
- Clean Streets & Public Places (including Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005)
 - Health
 - Older People
 - Efficiencies (including accommodation)
- 2.7 Cabinet is asked to consider whether it wishes to delete and include the areas for improvement identified in 2.5 & 2.6 above.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There are no direct financial implications to having an improvement plan other than the costs associated with the different areas for improvement.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Some areas of the Improvement Plan provide focus on some specific areas eg completion of the Waste Management Strategy. Other areas provide impact on these issues through the delivery of improvement eg implementing the Community Strategy.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The plan will continue to evolve as some areas for improvement are completed and new ones are identified.
- 5.2 It provides an opportunity for members and officers to use the Plan as part of a strategic overview approach to ensure the Council continues to move forward. It also plays an important role in the Council's Direction of Travel Assessment.
- 5.3 The plan is updated every 6 months with this in mind.

6. PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS

6.1 The Portfolio Holder supports the recommendations in this report.

7. RECOMMENDATION

7.1 That progress against the Council's Improvement Plan be noted; and

7.2 That Members identify any issues for inclusion in, or deletion from the Improvement Plan.

For further information

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Background papers

CPA Self Assessment
CPA Inspectors' Report

THE COUNCIL'S IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2004 – 2006 – PROGRESS (As at February 2006)

Improvement Activity and HOS Lead	Projected Outcomes	Current Position	Next report to			Target date for completion (if applic)	
			HOS	CMT	Cab		
1	Lead a multi agency response to help meet the diverse needs of the District by finalising the Community Strategy and ensuring the Community Strategy is implemented and reviewed (KS)	Clear Vision for the District, topic based objectives, priorities to be tackled and partnership based actions and resource. These to create economic growth, safer and healthier communities, an improved environment , a socially inclusive community providing freedoms and choice and greater opportunities for all	Community Strategy approved and published for 2004 –2007 along with progress report against 04/05 & 05/06 Action Plans. View on www.changinglivesnewforest.gov.uk Performance for both years is around 80% delivery by both NFDC and the Partnership. CANs developing the 06/07 Action Plan and identifying potential action for future years. Meetings of CAN Leads providing better opportunities for more of a cross cutting approach. Some further development issues required for 3 of the 11 CANs – Environment, Lifelong Learning and Older People need further work. CANs monitoring own actions plans and reporting to LSP Core Group December/January each year on progress. March LSP Core Group sets the following years action plan. 2006/07 is a key year of review for the Community Strategy. Process currently being established to include close working with the development of the Local Development Core Strategy. Community Bridging process developed as part of the Community Planning Guide. This links the work coming out of the Parish Plans and market town health checks with the Community Strategy and the resources of the LSP. The first action plans currently going through the bridging process.	(Meeting of CAN leads to be held 20/2/06 – 06/07 Action Plan & Review Process)	LSP 2 March 2006 (06/07 Action Plan & Review Process)	5 April 2006 (06/07 Action Plan & Review Process)	Implementati on of new strategy might need to be delayed to September 2007 in order to fit in with the Local Development Scheme

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2	Develop communication/consultation framework by reviewing effectiveness of communication(DA/NJG)/ consultation mechanisms (KS)	Clear understanding amongst employees and partners. Improved awareness of and increased involvement in Council activities (including hard to reach groups)	<p>Major communication review taking place following audit of communication channels.</p> <p>Consultation policy and guide produced. Council's programme of consultation planned created including Citizens Panel and Young People Panel surveys as well as e communication programme for the year ahead. Service plans and performance plan include the use of consultation results. Greater co-ordination of consultation planned for 06/07 including across LSP partners. Greater emphasis on face to face involvement being used and developed.</p>	March 06	<p>April 06</p> <p>February 06</p>		
3	Review effectiveness of democratic arrangements including developing role of review panels by reviewing structure and providing training/support (GO'R)	Real and robust scrutiny that has credibility with the public and an enhanced policy development role for non-executive members. Greater opportunity for strategic overview and cross cutting working to contribute towards the Council's performance management system	Scrutiny review completed. Implemented new arrangements including creation of the Corporate Overview Panel in September 04. Specific training delivered for members of the new panel and general scrutiny training and specific training for all panels delivered September – November. Members now have a clear role in the service planning process – particularly through the Lead Scrutiny Member (LSM) approach. Specific training given July/August 2005 Clear understanding of which panel is leading on and which panels have a real interest in each of the Council's corporate aims. Some good examples of work done and involvement of others from outside the Council. Current assessment of skills and general training required by Members taking place in order to agree programme for year ahead.				

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4	Develop senior managers' roles and structures (DY)	Firm focus on delivery of Council's priorities and strategies	Monthly Heads of Service meetings continuing to develop. Rotating Chairman opportunities and development of robust strategic and service based work programme. External review completed of HOS roles and conditions. Pilot extension of CMT group continued. More focused approach to key issues including corporate plan developments, performance management and future role of the group itself.	Monthly			
5	Develop ways of achieving more flexible working patterns (JG)	Meeting changing customer expectations and improving work/life balance of employees	Action plan agreed. Employee focus groups arranged. Steering group set up to agree policy changes. Working Group set up including employee side reps & Scrutiny Members. Flexible working protocol drafted and being piloted for 3 months. Ran pilot Summer 2005 and feedback was collated. Council wide protocol developed early 2006. Will run managers and employee briefings in March/April, pilot the protocol Council wide July – December 2006.		21/02/06	9/3/06 (IRC)	July 06
6	Build on establishment of Test Valley Partnership (JM)	Delivery of full benefits of joint working to provide a better service for public, and share lessons learnt	Partnership continues to deliver range of operational, financial and management benefits, with quarterly reports to Joint Committee. Review of benefits and future options/opportunities for developing the partnership conducted with joint NF/TV member/officer workshop on 8/12/05, followed by Joint Committee. Unanimous member support for continuing partnership. Agreement in principle to support further development, subject to business case. Officer team progressing.			Joint Committee 2/3/06	Ongoing

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7	Implement the new performance management framework by	Effective delivery of the Council's corporate plan and the Council's contribution towards the Community Strategy					
	a) Identify smarter targets against Council's priorities and aims as part of the service planning process (All)	Clear, smart targets against four priorities and other 22 aims	2006/07 service plans currently being completed for all services. HOS involved in reviewing success of the process and the guidelines issued in time to help develop the 2006/07 plans. Plans are geared to deliver on key service and corporate issues eg e gov, diversity & equalities workforce planning etc.SMART principles adopted for service planning and key target setting. Assessment of Council's key targets has again been made against the structure of the Corporate Plan. Medium term targets against each aim to be encouraged as part of the review of the Corporate Plan for inclusion in the Performance Plan.	All service plans to be completed by 31/3/06	Performance Plan development - May	Perf Plan approval Cabinet June Council June	Performance Plan 30 June

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	b) Ensure focused and rigorous review of performance against BVPI's and other measures (KS)	Identification of potential improvements to shape future service delivery	CMT and Members much better engaged in the use of performance information both from a service and strategic perspective. "Focusing on Performance" reports to CMT and COP include an annual report, plus exception reporting every few months. Basket of key PI's being developed for inclusion in Performance Plan this year but to be reviewed as part of the Corporate Plan review. Lead scrutiny member roles developed and service planning geared to making use of performance information in developing services improvement plans. Continually improving the Performance Plan through design amendments, challenging the criteria used for green, amber & red pi categories. The use of performance graphs have been well received amongst decision makers. Performance Monitoring software being developed to help strategic and service level monitoring.	Annual Report on performance in June. HOS input into CMT via DMTs on exception reports.	Annual Report June then exception reporting every few months.	Annual Report to COP in June then exception report to members every few months.	Ongoing
	c) Review of the Corporate Plan (KS)	A clear direction for what the Council wants to achieve over the next 4 years (2007 -11)	Draft process for review developed for agreement with Members. Two stage approach.	February 06	March 06	Member workshops - various	September 2006
	d) Improve the medium term financial strategy through better alignment of strategic, financial and workforce planning (CM)	Effective use of tax payers resources	Financial Strategy for 2005/06 onwards approved. Short and medium term financial objectives established and included within the service planning process. Individual proposals for 2005/06 are clearly linked to corporate priorities.			July 2005	Annual
8	Finalise the risk management strategy (CM)	An integrated approach to the identification, evaluation and control of risks	Strategy finalised. Currently piloting Risk Register in one directorate. Corporate Strategic Risk Assessment will be complete as soon as pilot is completed. Risk management included as part of the Service Planning Guidelines.		Spring 2005		Completed

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9	Agree and implement an enhanced and integrated e-government strategy (KC)	Improved delivery of Council services through innovative use of new technology	The Council is on target to complete the implementation of its e government implementation programme by 31 March 2006. The e government team is now concentrating on promoting the new access channels and on identifying the efficiency benefits arising from the investment programme.				31 March 2006 (e Government implementation programme)
10	Deliver the Council's Contact Centre vision (GM)	Enhanced and consistently high quality response service to customers across all access channels	The number of contacts dealt with by Customer Information Services continues to grow each year (27.2% 04, 17.6% 05). Contact centre team and local offices amalgamated into one section to help promote equality and consistency across access channels. Creation of Contact Centre provided contribution towards Council's efficiency targets. Opportunities for more self- service (via web and phone) being developed. The telephony system is producing very useful management information to help shape future service delivery. Performance against targets very satisfactory. Installation of call management technology at Appletree Court agreed at CMT to support latest phase ie integration of larger services into the Contact Centre eg Tax & Benefits, Housing and Planning.	June 2006		Ongoing work with portfolio holder and Lead Scrutiny Members	

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11	Explore methods of attracting additional external funding (CM)	Improve local services without cost to local tax payer	Increased attention to income generation opportunities, particularly within the expenditure planning process. This Council has joined with five other Hampshire district councils to employ a Joint Funding Officer hosted by HCC. The Council has a good record of attracting funds through its work in many areas. Examples include waste management, health, community safety partnership funding, planning development grant and use of the Lottery fund.				
12	a) Agree homelessness strategy (DB)	Reduce levels of homelessness in the district	Strategy completed and approved by Cabinet. Currently being reviewed.			Housing Review Panel – March 06	Completed
	b) Develop innovative ways of delivering affordable housing (DB)	Help create balanced sustainable communities	Requirements for land for affordable housing to be transferred to RSL's at nil value on sites delivered using planning powers. Implementation of New Forest affordable housing sustainable development framework. Investigation into a grant free model for development of surplus Council owned land and into the Council acquiring an equity stake in new dwellings as an alternative to giving grant. The Stock Options Appraisal process has been extended to encompass an investigation into alternative funding for new development. Joint working with other southern Hampshire LA's to investigate options for attracting funds for affordable housing into the District. Report to Cabinet in March re alternative approaches to asset management to create resources for affordable housing.			March 2006	Completed Completed

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	c) Develop clear approach to achieving the Decent Homes Standard (DB)	Achieve a high standard of public sector housing throughout the district	New stock survey complete and initial analysis completed. This has identified that only 14% of stock currently does not meet DHS but that 73% will become non-decent by 2010 if action is not taken. Options appraisal process currently underway will ensure that the required finance can be obtained to meet the target of achieving DHS by 2010. Reports considered by CMT and Cabinet. Reporting of progress against targets will be made on a quarterly basis to the Housing, health & Social Inclusion Review Panel. Asset Management Strategy now written incorporating DHS requirements and in process of being implemented. Appointed consultants to merge data in Housing Management System with Stock Survey data to help monitoring arrangements.				
13	Expand on the variety of methods for individuals to access training and development, including use of new technology and partnership working (JG)	A workforce capable of meeting the changing needs of the organisation today and in the future	Workforce Development Strategy has been agreed. European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) being piloted. Essential skills being piloted. E-learning being developed. Service development plans to be contained within each service plan, Head of Personnel to meet with each HoS. Every HoS produced a development plan by October 2005. Learning Zone – Intranet based employee information – launched January 2006. Includes on line learning. ICT learning and Development Strategy will be produced by June 2006.		Feb 2006		On-going

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14	Develop a learning culture at all levels which evaluates what we do and shares learning from successes and failures (NJG/JG)	A confident organisation which operates in a learning and no blame culture	Learning culture discussion paper discussed at HoS meeting and IRC. Raised awareness of opportunities for learning. Update taken to HoS incorporating action on investors in people. Complaints procedure revised to share learning. Learning to be incorporated in each HOS agenda. Housing and Commercial Services are piloting process mapping techniques and will report back to HoS in March 2006.	March 2006			On-going
15	Complete strategies/reviews required by Heart of the Forest, including:	Effective delivery of Council's corporate plan					
	a) Equalities Strategy (including Race Scheme) (DY/HR)	Council services and employment opportunities accessible to all.	Strategy completed. Emphasis now on delivery against the different levels of the Equalities Standard. 45% of Level 3 achieved December 2005. Draft Working Plan including objectives and targets for 06/07 to be carried out by Corporate Equalities Group (CEG) & Equalities Unit. Relevant key targets for 2007 to be included in Performance Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - achieve 100% of level 3 (31/3/07) - publish Disability Equalities Scheme (30/11/06) involving the disabled community and other stakeholders - publish a Gender Equality Scheme (31/3/07) 	Via Service Plans – annual meeting between Equalities Unit and each HOS	March 2006	Portfolio holder & Lead Scrutiny Members to agree draft working plan	60%Level 3 31/3/06 100%Level 3 31/3/ 07 DES 30/11/06 GES 31/3/07

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	b) Children and young people (MKD)	The production of an integrated strategy currently contained in the C&YP topic chapter of the Community Strategy that engages all agencies active in the District. A strategy that also serves as the Local Development Plan for "Every Child Matters". A strategy that has a clear and evident relationship to Service based plans and thinking.	Funding agreed by NFLSP, NFDC and HCC to scope the production of such a plan and develop communication links. LSP presentation and discussion in March 05. National duty to co-operate and national guidance on the production of plans, reinforce the desirability of a locality based multi agency plan. Internal Corporate Group formed to gear the Council's input into this work. Children's Plan now produced as consultation draft. Good level of input by NFDC. Chief Executive one of two representing Hampshire district Chief Executives on working group. Good links into the LSP. Children and Young People CAN currently being reviewed re role, structure and membership to ensure fit for purpose as it will be used as a key part in the future delivery of the Children's Plan in the District.		Updates to CAN Leads meeting every 3 months	Regular updates to LSP Core Group	
	c) Waste (in addition to Project Integra Business Plan) (JM/CR)	Clear overall approach to dealing with waste in the New Forest District.	Waste Strategy approved by Cabinet (4 August). Joint Municipal Waste Strategy being considered by Cabinet.			1 March 06	Waste Strategy completed
16	Evaluate the options arising from decision over a New Forest National Park and agree the Council's strategy ()	Arrangements that best meet the needs of the people of the New Forest district and maximise local accountability	National Park Authority established. NFDC Cabinet decision taken on preferred partnership for planning service delivery. NPA preferred other options. Discussions with NPA ongoing re further opportunities for joint working.	Regular updates as appropriate		March/April 06	NPA to be fully established by 1 April 2006
17	Procurement (CM))	Develop a strategic framework to procurement that ensures the Council delivers services in the most effective and efficient manner.	Working group established. Draft Procurement Strategy and action plan currently being developed. Delivery of the Action Plan will extend throughout 2006/07.		March 06	April 06	April 2005

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18	Complaints (GO'R/GM/HR)	Ensuring consistency and maximise learning across the Council from complaints received.	A system that provides a consistent approach to recording, analysing and reporting all complaints was piloted for 6 months in 3 major services and went live 1/04/05 with all Council services. Work continuing on the reporting module. Testing of this module to take place in 06/07.	Corporate Complaints Unit work with individual HOS.	June 06	COP June 06. Standards Committee -summer 06	Completed March 05. To be reviewed annually.
19	Working more proactively with key stakeholders to improve local decision making by						
	a) Improving working relationships with town and parish councils in respect of planning decision-making. (JW/CE)	Better understanding of key issues which influence planning decision making to enable local communities to play a more effective role in planning outcomes in the local community.	Following consultation with all local councils part of Planning Delivery Grant used to appoint parish plans liaison officer to help parishes in their production of parish plans. Countryside Rural pathfinder project incorporated into this initiative. As at January 2006 3 parishes have completed 15 parishes have started, 11 parishes have expressed an interest in starting and 8 are not interested at this stage in producing a community plan. Currently putting together consultation and involvement initiatives for joint working on Community Strategy and Local Development Core Strategy. This to include methods to engage with geographical communities. Briefing notes provided to parish councils identifying key issues for each application. This is the main reason for 20% fewer applications needed to be reported to Planning Committee compared to 04.	Regular meetings with the multi agency COMPOST group (Community Planning Officers Support Team)		6 monthly progress reports to portfolio holder and LSP CAN Leads and Core Group	Parish Plans Liaison Officer funded until April 2007

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	b) Agreeing a compact with the voluntary sector (SP)	Clarity and transparency of expectation about delivery to and from the voluntary sector.	Compact for the whole of Hampshire now agreed and published. Launched at a Chairman's evening with the voluntary sector in November 2004. LSP agreed to join Compact December 2005.				Completed - November 2004
20	Work in partnership with other bodies through Local Area Agreements(LAA) and Local Public Service Agreements (LPSA) (KS)	Stronger delivery against the priorities of Hampshire and the District. Attraction of extra resources into the District.	The Council has been a significant player in the work on LPSA2 participating in more targets than any other district and enabling the involvement of its partners in the county - wide discussions. Currently finalising negotiations re stretch and levels of pump priming and reward monies required for inclusion in LPSA2 sub agreements. LPSA monitoring via LAA process. Develop local mechanisms for measuring local baselines and performance.				Finalise LPSA2 with Government 3/2/06 Finalise sub agreements – February 06. Deliver targets by 08
21	Develop this Improvement Plan and ensure it is delivered (DY)	An improved organisation which has made full use of the CPA process to achieve its aims for improving the quality of people's lives	Improvement Plan updated at least every 6 months including targeted completion dates for individual actions. Need to consider impact of any changes on CMT work programme and the Council's Forward Plan. Corporate Overview Panel now has specific review role for the Improvement Plan. Individual services are encouraged to consider contributions towards the plan as part of the service planning process. Need to consider implications of future CPA criteria on the Plan.	January 06	February 06	March 06	Ongoing Individual targets for specific actions.