

## **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 ongoing Direction of Travel Assessments 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 March 2006 the plan has been updated to reflect the decisions taken at that meeting and latest progress against the various improvement activities.
- 2.5 In addition, suggested new activities relating to the development of a community engagement plan and implementation of the performance management software have been included.
- 2.6 Cabinet is asked to consider whether it wishes to add to or delete any improvement activities within this latest report. Adjustments to the format are likely to be recommended in future reports.

### **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 the area of improvement eg implementing the Community Strategy.

### **5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 All Equality and Diversity Implications will be considered at each stage throughout the process.

### **6. CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1 The plan will continue to evolve as some areas for improvement are completed and new ones are identified.
- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 The plan is updated on a regular basis with this in mind.

### **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 – 2007 – PROGRESS (As at February 2007)

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 & 06/07 Action Plans. View on <a href="http://www.changinglivesnewforest.gov.uk">www.changinglivesnewforest.gov.uk</a> Performance for each year is around 80% delivery by both NFDC and the Partnership. Meetings of CAN Leads providing better opportunities for more of a cross cutting approach. Some further development issues required for 2 of the 10 CANs – Environment, and Older People need further work. Lifelong Learning now incorporated into work of other CANs. CANs monitoring own actions plans and reporting to LSP Core Group December/January each year on progress. March LSP Core Group sets the following year's action plan. 2006/07 is a key year of review for the Community Strategy. Process has been established to include close working with the development of the Local Development Core Strategy & National Park Management Plan. "Future Matters" issues and options report published for consultation in November. Almost 600 responses. Joint Member Board (LSP/NFDC/NPA) established to continue joining up the processes. 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.	Meetings of HOS - 5/9/06, CAN leads and joint NFDC/NPA/LSP 18/9/06 – input into issues and options report. Public consultation taken place November – January. Draft Community Strategy – June/July 2007, final strategy – winter 2007.	CMT – March LSP 15 March 2007 (Analysis from Future Matters, 06/07 Action Plan & Review Process)	4 July Cabinet & July LSP Core Group - Draft Community Strategy	Implementati on of new strategy delayed to winter 2007 in order to fit in with the Local Developmen t Core Strategy

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2	a) Develop communication framework by reviewing effectiveness of communication (DA/DY)	Clear understanding amongst employees and partners.	Major communication review undertaken following audit of communication channels. Improvement plans developed and some targeted action already undertaken. Framework being developed.	TBA			
	b) Develop consultation framework by reviewing effectiveness of consultation mechanisms and development of a Community Engagement Strategy for the Council (KS)	Improved awareness of and increased involvement in Council activities (including "hard to engage with groups").	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 07/08 including across LSP partners. Greater emphasis on face to face involvement being used and developed. Discussion paper on developing a Community Engagement Strategy produced for initial debate at Communications Group. Particular interest via the Crime & Disorder Panel as a result of changes in legislation and police operations. Greater opportunities to collect and use community intelligence about crime & disorder.	TBA			

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3	Review effectiveness of democratic arrangements including developing role of review panels by reviewing structure and providing training/support (RR)	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	Implemented new arrangements including creation of the Corporate Overview Panel in September 04. Member training on the new structure delivered September – November 04. 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. Assessment of skills and general training required by Members undertaken in 05/06 in order to agree programme for year ahead. Member survey issued December 06 to assess their perception of involvement in performance management/service planning.				
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			

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5	Develop ways of achieving more flexible working patterns (MS)	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. Revised flexitime scheme agreed in 2006 and implemented in October 2006, the revised scheme due to be reviewed in October 2007.	Input into review – Autumn 07	Input into review Autumn 07	IRC	
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. Project Brief / PID prepared. Project Board established. Project Manager appointed. Report to Board. Report to Mngt.Teams			Joint Committee	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	2007/08 service plans currently being completed for all services. HOS involved in reviewing success of the process. Guidelines issued in time to help develop the 2005. 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 31/3/07	Performance Plan development - May	Perf Plan approval Cabinet June Council June	Performance Plan 30 June
	b) Ensure focused and rigorous review of performance against BVPI's and other measures (KS/DD)	Identification of potential improvements to shape future service delivery	CMT and Members much better engaged. "Focus on Performance" reports to CMT & COP include an annual report, plus exception reporting. Basket of key PI's developed for inclusion in Performance Plan. Review as part of the Corporate Plan review. Member roles developed and service planning geared to making use of performance information in developing services improvement plans. Member survey undertaken December 06. Continually improving the Performance Plan The use of performance graphs have been well received amongst decision makers.	Annual Report on performance in June. HOS input into CMT via DMTs on exception reports.  PMS demo in Spring 2007 as part of pilot with 3 service areas.	Annual Report June then exception reporting every few months.	Annual Report to COP in June then exception report to members every few months.	Ongoing

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7	c) Implementation of the performance management software system across the Council (KS/DD)	Greater ownership of and interest in performance management by members and officers.	Performance Monitoring software acquired to help strategic and service level monitoring. Establishing it as a corporate tool for performance plan and piloting its use with 3 service areas.	Spring 07			Full implementation of PMS software system to be determined following results from the pilot process.
	d) 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.	Spring 07		Member workshops – various post May	Delayed to enable input from /ownership of, new members - publish September 07
8	Achieve Government efficiency targets (including review of accommodation) (CM)	NFDC services provided at better value for money	Government targets currently being met. Future pressures require financial capacity to be developed by building on existing approach. Peer review agreed the Council had some good examples of best practice but the approach lacked strategic cohesion. Strategic framework and work programme agreed.	Updates on key projects at each meeting		At key milestones	On-going
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 completed the implementation of the e government implementation strategy. A follow on project has been approved to continue to develop and promote the use of e channels in order to reduce the total costs to serve and to encourage our citizens to self serve where and when they want to.				31 March 2006 (e Government implementation programme)



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10	Deliver the Council's Contact Centre vision (GM)	Enhanced and consistently high quality response service to customers across all access channels	<p>On 7 November 2006 HOS reaffirmed that the continuing expansion of the contact centre approach was one of the top projects that might help achieve efficiency gains. On 28 November 2006, CMT agreed that the incremental moves had worked well so far, but that it was now time for all externally-facing services to adopt the contact centre approach, unless valid reasons were approved for not doing so.</p> <p>Call management technology was installed in Appletree Court in July 2006 as planned. A plan for the next phase of the project development, covering the period April 2007 to March 2009, will be finalized in February 2007. The plan will focus on the two main administrative centres. Key activities to include are the integration of the switchboard and the introduction of self-service transactions by phone eg payments. The plan will integrate with the new E-working project.</p>			Ongoing work with portfolio holder and Lead Scrutiny Members	
11	Explore methods of attracting additional external funding (CM)	Improve local services without cost to local tax payer	The Council employed a Joint Funding Officer hosted by HCC with five other authorities who decided not to renew the contract. In light of usage made by this Council it was decided not to pursue this option further.				Closed

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12	a) Develop innovative ways of delivering affordable housing (DB)	Help create balanced sustainable communities	<p>Requirements for land for affordable housing to be transferred to RSL's at nil value on sites delivered using planning powers - CMT &amp; members concluded that all disposals will be considered on a site by site basis. Implementation of New Forest affordable housing sustainable development framework. – All new affordable housing schemes to comply with the SDF.</p> <p>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 – ongoing investigation linked to new Government policy &amp; initiatives.</p> <p>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. £7.7 m of Hsg Corporation Funding secured by Partnership to develop rural housing in Hampshire.</p> <p>PUSH identified as growth point by Govt. £3.65 m awarded for enabling projects. Report to Cabinet in March re alternative approaches to asset management to create resources for affordable housing. Strategic Asset Management Group formed.</p>				Completed
							Completed

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12	b) Develop clear approach to achieving the Decent Homes Standard (DB)	Achieve a high standard of public sector housing throughout the district	<p>For the past two years we have employed consultants to assist us with our decent homes monitoring and during 07/08 we will be purchasing "Keystone" asset management software to take on this task "in house". The new software will also enable accurate forecasting of future needs to meet the Decent Homes Standard and a new 10 year programme of works to meet and maintain the DHS will be produced during 07/08.</p> <p>Further analysis of the condition of the Council's stock has indicated that the need to meet the DHS is some £2m pa less than originally estimated and as a result the HRA Business Plan will be totally reviewed during the early part of 2007 to establish the effect on the long term viability of the HRA Business Plan.</p> <p>Regular reporting of the Council's performance against the DHS is reported to Members at the Housing, Health &amp; Social Inclusion Panel as well as regular updates to the DCLG.</p>				

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13	Expand on the variety of methods for individuals to access training and development, including use of new technology and partnership working (MS)	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) piloted and now part of the Corporate Training & Development Programme. Essential skills piloted in 2006 and this has been very successful. SEEDA has recently approved a joint bid from New Forest/Test Valley to develop essential skills further. ICT Learning Strategy agreed in September 2006, which focused on the auditing of current ICT skills within the Council against ICT skill requirements for the future and producing a development plan to bridge the gap. Learning Zone – Intranet based employee information – launched January 2006 and now includes a link to Ashbridge e learning centre which was launched in January 2007. ICT Learning and Development Strategy produced.				On-going
14	Develop a learning culture at all levels which evaluates what we do and shares learning from successes and failures (NJG/MS)	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. Reported to HoS in March 2006. Further work to be carried out in 2007/08 relating to Council culture.				On-going

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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. Achieved target of 60% of Level 3 – 31/3/06. Currently on target to achieve 100% of level 3 (31/3/07). Published Disability Equalities Scheme (30/11/06) involving the disabled community and other stakeholders. Gender Equality Scheme approved by Cabinet (3/1/07)	Via Service Plans – annual meeting between Equalities Unit and each HOS	March 2007	Portfolio holder & Lead Scrutiny Members to agree draft working plan	100%Level 3 31/3/ 07  DES 30/11/06  GES 31/3/07
	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) Older People (DY)	Better services to older people.	Work developing via HCC and LSP to provide a coordinated approach to older people in the district to link NFDC services with health and social services. HCC main contact is away for 6 months.				

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15	d) 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.				Waste Strategy completed
	e) Health (AR)	Establish the Council's role in the health agenda following reorganization of the local Health services.	Role in current projects being reviewed: Healthy Horizons and Obesity Management exercise referral schemes, physical activity in Pennington, community transport projects via Community First, PNA in Calshot, Pennington and New Milton and Older Persons Focus Group				
16	Evaluate the options arising from decision over a New Forest National Park and agree the Council's strategy (DY)	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			NPA fully established 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.	Procurement Strategy approved by Cabinet 3/1/07. An implementation working group has been established and an action plan to deliver the Strategy is currently being developed.	May	May	June	On-going
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 07	COP June 07. Standards Committee -summer 07	Completed March 05. To be reviewed annually.

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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. (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 October 2006 5 parishes have completed 19 parishes have started, 4 parishes have expressed an interest in starting and 9 are not interested at this stage in producing a community plan. All parishes involved in Future Matters issues and options consultation. Community Engagement Strategy 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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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. Negotiations finalized re stretch and levels of pump priming and reward monies. LPSA2 sub agreements now signed. LPSA monitoring via LAA process. NFDC corporate group established which meets every 3 months.Developing local mechanisms for measuring local baselines and performance.				Finalised LPSA2 with Government 3/2/06 Finalised sub agreements – February 06. Deliver targets by 31/3/09
21	Clean Streets and Public Places (including Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005). (JM)	A cleaner environment.	CNEA Project Team established. Report including schedule of powers/delegations approved by Cabinet ( 01/11/06 ) Enforcement Policy, Risk Assessments and Training Programme in progress. Implementation target 01/04/07				Commence 01/04/07  Annual Review