

CABINET

1 FEBRUARY 2012

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN / ANNUAL BUDGET 2012/13 REPORT OF BUDGET TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Introduction by the Group's Chairman Cllr John Ward

Firstly I would like to thank the Portfolio Holders for giving up their time to contribute towards what was undoubtedly a rigorous process. This has been a new approach to scrutiny of the budget and to assist in the budget development by proposing areas for further review. The Members of the Group have found the process highly worthwhile and have learnt an invaluable amount about the budget and the hard work put into its development by the Portfolio Holders at a particularly difficult time.

The Group met over November/December/January to examine all areas of the budget, including the Capital Programme and areas targeted for savings, and, through a detailed review of the budget book, highlighted service areas where they wished to seek further information from the relevant Portfolio Holder. The Group then formulated a set of questions for each Portfolio and Portfolio Holders were invited individually to attend a meeting of the Group to respond to these questions. All significant areas of expenditure and income were covered including parking, refuse, planning fees, health and leisure and housing.

Shadow Portfolio Holders and Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels were invited to attend the meetings to observe the process.

Areas for future review were identified, by the Group and the Portfolio Holder, during these meetings. These are shown overleaf.

Details of the questions raised by the Task & Finish Group and the answers provided by Portfolio Holders are attached.

Conclusion

The meetings with Portfolio Holders provided an incisive, thorough and comprehensive scrutiny of the portfolio budgets and I would like to thank them again for their openness, support and participation in the process. The process itself has been very thorough and has allowed Members an enhanced understanding of the budget process and the details which make it up.

It was pleasing to hear the Leader's vision for the future in terms of working with partners and the community to deliver community benefits and the openness to explore opportunities and alternatives in service delivery where the outcome is right for the New Forest.

As a result of this exercise the Budget Task & Finish Group is confident to advise all Members of the Council that the current budget for the 2012/13 financial year is robust and given the uncertainty the financial strategy is enabling us to look to the future with confidence. We recognise that there are difficult decisions and choices in front of us and it will be for all Members to be part of that process.

Areas for further information:

The Group has identified a number of areas where future updates or information would be welcomed.

- We note that the Portfolio Holder for Planning will be implementing charges for pre application advice. The Group would be interested in the outcome of this change, including its impact on planning enforcement, and would welcome a report back to Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel in the future.
- Whilst we acknowledge that the system for managing the Capital Programme is working well the Group would request that the Cabinet look at how all Members can play a part in the development of new capital schemes.
- We recognise the significant changes to Housing funding at this time and the desire to provide affordable housing in the New Forest. The Group feel that the Community Overview & Scrutiny Panel would benefit from a review of the 'revised' strategy for providing affordable housing at the appropriate time.
- For many communities in the New Forest there is concern over the Government reductions in funding for coastal projects and the Group would welcome an update from the Portfolio Holder, when more information is known, on how schemes will be delivered in the future without undue costs falling on local taxpayers.
- We welcome the offer from the Portfolio Holder, when more is known, of updating all Members on the impacts, both to our finances and to local residents that will follow the introduction of the Universal Credit.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE PANEL

That the outcome of the Task and Finish Group, as set out in the questions and answers attached, be presented to Cabinet and made available to all Members of the Council to assist with the setting of a Budget and Council Tax 2012/13.

Councillor John Ward
Chairman of Budget Task and Finish Group and
Chairman of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Members of the Budget Task and Finish Group

Cllr John Ward (Chairman)
Cllr Mrs Sue Bennison
Cllr Allan Glass
Cllr Jeremy Heron
Cllr Mrs Maureen Robinson
Cllr Mrs Christine Ward

INDEX

	Page
INTRODUCTION BY THE GROUP'S CHAIRMAN CLLR JOHN WARD	1 - 2
LEADER'S AND FINANCE & EFFICIENCY PORTFOLIO	3 – 6
ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO	7 - 10
HEALTH AND LEISURE PORTFOLIO	11 - 13
HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO	14 - 19
PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION PORTFOLIO	20 - 22

Questions for Portfolio Holders

Leader's and Finance & Efficiency Portfolios

1. Overall Strategy

1.1 We note the approach to reviews and the targeting of savings through the use of workstreams - are you confident that they will deliver a balanced budget in 2012/13 without an increase in Council Tax?

Portfolio Holder:

The first draft of the budget appeared to indicate that there would be a £195,000 shortfall, but since then savings had been made as follows:

Dibden Golf Course £100,000; bank charges reductions £100,000, audit fee £20,000; new homes grant £720,000

The budget would therefore be balanced for 2012/13.

When asked about the impact in subsequent years, the Finance and Efficiency Portfolio Holder indicated that 2013/14 and beyond would be difficult years, due to a number of uncertainties. Government grants were expected to continue to reduce and the one-off grants were not guaranteed. In addition, costs may start to rise, particularly pay. It was noted that a 1% pay award equated approximately to a 2.5% increase in Council Tax, although it was acknowledged that pay awards were negotiated nationally and were not within the Council's direct control.

1.2 A significant impact on the Council's budget is employee costs. Is it likely that there will be a pay award next year?

Portfolio Holder:

The likelihood of a pay award in 2012/13 was still unknown, although there was a possibility of a modest increase for those earning less than £20,000, and reference was made to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's suggestion that such employees should receive £250 per year extra.

1.3 Given the financial outlook where will the Council be looking to make savings beyond those already identified?

Portfolio Holder

It was commented that, to achieve the necessary savings, nothing could be ruled out. Discretionary services would be included in any review.

The identification of further savings was being approached in a very broad sense and all areas were open to consideration. Following the optimisation project, work would continue with the National Park Authority to remodel services and provide them jointly to eliminate any duplication wherever possible. Partnership working, for instance on tourism, would be a key feature of future work.

The Council would seek to find efficiencies with office accommodation in partnership with any agency where a service to the public was provided Post Offices or Job Centres, for example, may provide opportunities for shared accommodation where it was of mutual benefit and in the interests of the local community. Examples of this were the Ringwood and Lymington Council Offices which were shared with other organisations.

A lot of work had already been done to reduce costs and some tough decisions would be required in the future to decide on the Council's priorities, particularly looking at discretionary services. Much would depend on any future pay awards and the pressures those may bring.

A question was asked concerning the possibility of outsourcing support services. Legal Services as an example was quoted. In answer, it was felt that given the Business Plan and that Legal Services had Lexcel accreditation it was hard to see how the current service could be improved. The current benefits of having an internal legal service where legal advice could be obtained without delay and at a reasonable cost were acknowledged.

Other discretionary areas discussed included of the Council's CCTV provision, which currently cost approximately £400,000. It was noted that the Council's partners did not make significant contributions to these costs.

1.4 Now the optimisation project has finished can you tell us if it has been delivered on budget and will it deliver the forecast savings?

Portfolio Holder:

It was reported that the optimisation project had been completed and had both been delivered on target and budget. Annual savings were projected to be £250K-£300K per year plus further car parking income. It has been a successful project with the National Park Authority which would achieve efficiencies and improved working conditions.

1.5 What is the Council's approach to broader partnership working i.e. shared services or management contracts?

Portfolio Holder:

The intention was to broaden the scope of partnership working and to be flexible about the use of buildings, allowing a combination of services to be provided in one place.

Reference was made to some authorities such as Southampton City Council which commissioned many of its services and it was asked whether the New Forest would adopt a similar approach. It was felt that the quality of service to the public was a key consideration when such issues were being considered. The Council will seek to work in partnership with other local authorities in the provision of services, but the emphasis will remain to continue to provide what is right and wanted by local people.

2. Portfolio Specific – Leader’s

2.1 Employment & Tourism

- **We note the recent service review of Employment & Tourism. When are the proposals from the Task and Finish Group being implemented?**

Portfolio Holder:

It was noted that the Group’s recommendations had been adopted by Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel and Cabinet. The first phase for 2012/13 had been implemented and the second phase for 2013/14 was being taken forward.

- **Has budget provision been made for any known costs associated with the Olympic torch events planned for by the district council?**

Portfolio Holder:

£20,000 was the overall maximum budget for the Olympic events, identified from within existing budgets. Of which, £9,000 was for the torch events and £6,000 was being used towards the Cultural Olympiad Initiative. Town Councils were also contributing. No monies were being directed towards the Diamond Jubilee.

3. Portfolio Specific – Finance & Efficiency

3.1 Council Tax Benefits

- **How is the Council preparing for the Universal Credit and localisation of Council Tax Benefit changes to be introduced in 2013/14? Is there budget provision to manage the changes?**

Portfolio Holder:

The Universal Credit and localisation of Council Tax Benefit details had not yet been published but the effect on the Council could be massive. Housing Benefit was to be transferred to the Department for Work and Pensions. The Government was programming these changes to be phased in over 2013-2017. The Council would be unable to deduct rent due from benefit which may increase rent arrears. A seminar would be arranged for members when more details were known.

3.2 Community Partnerships

- **Are the proposals of the Community Grants Task & Finish Group related to this Portfolio (CAB and Community First) being implemented?**

Portfolio Holder:

Our review to grants to voluntary and other organisations had resulted in a reduction of grant to Community First by £9,000 and a reduction in grant of £24,000 for Citizens’ Advice Bureau. The Council was now in negotiation with the CAB regarding reduced rent at the New Milton offices whilst the Council found another tenant. It was not envisaged that these measures would reduce the CAB service levels to the public and the CAB continued to meet their demand.

3.3 Corporate & Democratic Core

- **We note the changes in Member structures. Will this deliver the financial benefits set out?**

Portfolio Holder:

It was noted that the workstream target was a saving of £100,000. Full year savings had achieved £134,000, comprising £56,000 in members' allowances, £66,000 savings from a reduction of staff and £9,000 in print machine lease reductions. Further efforts were being made to reduce the use of paper and postage from a trial use of electronic provision of agendas and reports.

3.4 Hythe Marina and Industrial Estates

- **We note from budget monitoring that income has reduced. What strategy has been put in place for safeguarding future income?**

Portfolio Holder:

Income from Hythe Marina was based on a contract entitling NFDC to 13.5% of rent collected by Marina Developments Limited. This income had fallen due to vacant commercial property. Efforts were being made to attract new tenants.

3.5 Procurement

- **Are significant service contracts being reviewed i.e. Banking arrangements?**

Portfolio Holder:

£108,000 savings in bank charges were likely to be achieved next year and further savings could result from a change in credit card operator.

3.6 Capital Programme

- **Can you outline the Council's approach to the capital strategy for next year and beyond?**

Portfolio Holder:

The strategy was to maintain the Council's assets in good repair, ensuring that they were either earning income, or fully utilised. All expenditure/disposals were overseen by monthly Asset Management Group meetings. Monitoring of capital expenditure was done on a quarterly basis. Some members of the Working Group felt that there could be greater transparency and scrutiny of capital budgets in the future.

Given the breadth of changes to housing funding, provision of affordable housing and other issues it was felt that the relevant scrutiny panel would benefit from more regular and detailed reports on the long term housing strategy at appropriate intervals.

Questions for Portfolio Holder

Environment Portfolio

1. Portfolio Specific

1.1 Refuse Collection

- **We are aware that commercial waste is subject to review. Could the Portfolio Holder provide an update on the progress or the review and whether opportunities for maximising or generating income are being considered?**

Portfolio Holder:

The review is in its final stages and a report will be submitted to the Environment Review Panel on 12th January. The Council is one of the highest commercial waste collecting districts but there are opportunities for generating more income and these have been considered and some actions are currently being put in place to maximise this. These involve ensuring all businesses are paying for the removal of their commercial waste. This will be discussed in the report. Initial thoughts are that there could be an increase in recycling income of £10,000

1.2 Street Scene

- **Has the current economic situation given rise to an increase in fly tipping and what is the Council doing in terms of deterrents and enforcement? Can the Portfolio Holder comments on the cost effectiveness of these activities?**

Portfolio Holder:

There has been a slight increase in fly tipping activity in the last twelve months. We are working closely with the police and the Environment Agency on any significant leads that identify the culprits, including stops on vehicles. However they seldom use the same location and rarely leave any evidence. Should a location become a significant hot spot we have the ability to deploy CCTV cameras and have done so. However unless we are confident of success the cost of deploying the equipment is expensive. Householders often think they have paid for their items to be disposed of properly and the onus is on them to ensure appropriate disposal so increasing public awareness and vigilance is the best and most costs effective way forward.

1.3 Cemeteries

- **We note the increase in income from 2009/10 to 2010/11. Given the sensitivities of this service are there any further opportunities for maximising income?**

Portfolio Holder:

Each year the Cemeteries Officer carries out a benchmarking survey of neighbouring Authorities fees and charges. Officers are currently exploring the options for gaining additional income and reviewing the policy of charging for non residents.

The cost of the service is kept constantly under review and new arrangements have recently been introduced to set out foundations for memorials in advance which enables closer positioning of graves and should minimise inspection and maintenance of memorials.

1.4 Coast Protection

- **Could the Portfolio Holder provide an update on protecting our coastline in light of national grant reductions?**

Portfolio Holder:

There has been a significant change in the funding mechanism for coastal projects with very few schemes now receiving 100% government grant funding. This could have a significant impact on the Council's capital budget although currently the Council's policy is to only undertake schemes where 100% funding is received. There is a need to consider the policy and funding for any future schemes.

1.5 Grounds Maintenance

- **We note that this budget is used to enhance the Hampshire County Council (HCC) contribution for grass cutting on land owned by HCC. Given the current economic situation is the affordability of this arrangement likely to be reviewed?**

Portfolio Holder:

The formula used to calculate the enhanced cut is proportional on the number of actual cuts achieved. Reducing the number of cuts, currently a maximum of 10 does not positively reduce costs.

Weed control is also carried out under contract from the County Council which this year has resulted in a saving of £10,000.

1.6 Land Drainage

- **Could the Portfolio Holder provide an update on any future changes or responsibilities in this area of work?**

Portfolio Holder:

This is an area that has been subject to new legislation and discussions are ongoing with the lead authority, now the County Council, over permissive powers so I am unable to provide much of an update for the longer term at this stage. The service is resourced by a highly experienced team whose expertise and skills have been used across Hampshire. This may provide an opportunity for future income generation but this is not possible to quantify.

1.7 Public Conveniences

- **We note that public conveniences are subject to review. Can the Portfolio Holder provide a progress update on the review?**
- **Are the costs of public conveniences likely to further decrease as a result of Ringwood Gateway?**

Portfolio Holder:

The review is underway and will be reported to the Environment Review Panel.

The new model for facilities provides a better service and is delivery savings with the new facilities (Fordingbridge and Keyhaven) seeing a significant increase in usage but a reduction in maintenance costs which has already resulted in an annual saving of £10,000. The new style of single modular cubicle toilets at Ringwood Gateway is likely to see a further reduction in maintenance costs.

The service will be kept under review and opportunities for rationalisation or provision of new facilities will be explored.

1.8 Keyhaven River

- **Has the potential for generating further income been explored and are current charges in line with the market for the south coast?**

Portfolio Holder:

The current costs of fees and charges relating to the Keyhaven River have been considered taking in a review of charges for Lymington and Beaulieu rivers.

The moorings will be subject to further review either by forming a Task and Finish Group or an Officer review to Overview and Scrutiny.

1.9 Environmental Health Services (Excl Pest Control)

- **Could the Portfolio Holder provide an update on the current provision of the dog warden service?**

Portfolio Holder:

The Dog Warden service is provided by one warden, previously two, and was brought back in house in 2010/11, after a period of outsourcing. There is a statutory duty to deal with stray dogs and any spare capacity is used to resource issues such as dog fouling. Kennel costs are minimised through regular assessment of the kennels used but only a proportion of these costs, around £10,000 is recovered. Vehicle and administration costs have also reduced through these new arrangements.

1.10 Pest Control

- **Given the commercial competition for aspects of pest control has the provision of the service been subject to review?**

Portfolio Holder:

The Pest Control service has been subjected to a detailed review resulting in a number of options being given. There are certain statutory functions of the service and although commercial pest control isn't one of them authorities that have stopped providing this service or increased charges have seen an increase in the cost of their statutory enforcement activities.

The service is on target to meet the budget in terms of costs and income.

1.11 Grants

- **Are the proposals of the Community Grants Task & Finish Group for this Portfolio (Reserves Management) being implemented?**

Portfolio Holder:

The recommendation to reduce the reserves management grant of £4,000 by £600 has yet been subject to a decision and I'm not therefore in a position to comment.



Questions for Portfolio Holder

Health & Leisure Portfolio

1. Portfolio Specific

1.1 Health & Leisure Centres

- We note the management review within the Health & Leisure service. Can the Portfolio Holder provide an update on the current position and whether any future strategies for further savings have been identified?
- Could the Portfolio Holder provide an update on the impact Academy School status has had on current and future budgets (withdrawal of HCC funding)?
- Given the current economic pressures is the budget on target?

Portfolio Holder:

The review saved £1.5 million over 2/3 years through changes to the management structure. This has brought about consistency in terms of pricing and procedures and has enabled more effective marketing of the service. The expenditure budget for Health & Leisure Centres specifically is approximately £30,000 underspent and income is £139K ahead of target. Fees and charges are routinely compared with other providers and have been static for the past three years.

Negotiations are ongoing with Schools regarding the impact of Academy status and payments for usage, although Hampshire County Council have provided some funding for this year. Costs have been examined on an actual basis per hour and schools will be recharged these costs for the number of hours usage agreed. The likely result will be a reduction in income received, most significantly at Applemore, but it is anticipated that this shortfall will be mitigated through increased membership and alternative usage. The new centralised arrangements for marketing are more effective in maximising facilities and using them in a more profitable way.

The revenue implications of new capital projects are properly considered before implementation. Capital projects are important in generating new income, for example, when capital monies were used to improve leisure facilities, which in turn encouraged higher customer use and therefore increased revenue incomes. Where possible (excluding Health & Safety or DDA) capital bids have been reviewed with a view to extending periods between refurbishment or replacement but there is a balance to ensure that membership levels are maintained.

The centres are an important facility for adults and children and a huge asset to the District at a reasonable cost to taxpayers.

1.2 Dibden Golf Centre

- **We note the ongoing review of Dibden Golf Centre. Could the Portfolio Holder provide an update on the progress of the review?**
- **Given the current economic pressures is the budget on target?**

Portfolio Holder:

The management and operation of the Golf Centre is currently out to tender with two companies. The results of the tender exercise will be reported back in January to determine the way forward. This arrangement should help in bringing an overall strategic direction from golf specialists whilst retaining it as a municipal facility.

Although there is an anticipated profit for the year the budget estimate was previously reduced and the final position is likely to reflect the revised target.

1.3 Eling Toll Bridge

- **Could the Portfolio Holder provide an update on the current arrangements and any future strategies for the bridge and/or the tide mill?**

Portfolio Holder:

Up until recently the District Council were responsible for the running and operating of the Tide Mill and Toll Bridge. Responsibility has now been transferred to Totton Town Council under a lease arrangement to join up the attraction with the cafe and heritage centre into one experience, specifically with the aim of increasing visitor numbers. Under the lease arrangement the District Council provide funding for staffing at the Tide Mill (approximately £40,000) with the expectation that this subsidy will fall as visitor numbers increase. A heritage lottery fund bid of approximately £1 million has been submitted to upgrade the Mill and this has successfully made it to the second stage of the bid process.

Charging for the Toll Bridge is intended to deter usage and help preserve both the Bridge and the Tide Mill. The effectiveness of these arrangements could be looked at again in the future.

1.4 Grants (See also Sports and Community Development budgets)

- **Are the proposals of the Community Grants Task & Finish Group for this Portfolio (excluding CAB and Community First) being implemented? Did the review include the grant aid scheme through local ward members?**

Portfolio Holder:

All recommendations have been implemented. The grant aid scheme through local ward members has only been in operation for a few years and the panel suggested that these be increased from £500 per grant to £750. In this time of austerity it has been decided that they will be increased to £600 with the additional budget being used to fund Olympic related community bids.

1.5 Open Spaces

- **Is there any scope or intention to review the ownership and future maintenance of open spaces currently owned by the Council?**

Portfolio Holder:

The option to transfer open spaces has been briefly examined and this will continue to be looked at, although the cost to the District Council is relatively low.

1.6 Public Health and Social Inclusion

- **We are aware that this area is in the process of change. Can the Portfolio Holder provide an update on progress or the likely developments for the future of this service?**

Portfolio Holder:

The Council jointly funds one post with the PCT. This is to be replaced by Sothern Health, the delivery arm of the new practice based commissioning arrangements through GPs. The cost implications to the Council won't change unless we decide to invest more in the service. Going forward there will be closer liaison with GP's which may present opportunities for joint working.



Questions for Portfolio Holder

Housing & Communities Portfolio

1. Portfolio Specific

1.1 Housing Stock

- **Could the Portfolio Holder provide an update on the Council's future housing strategy in light of the planned changes to the Housing Revenue Account through the self financing model?**

Portfolio Holder:

The recent work of the HRA Task and Finish Group and the recent report to the Community and Overview Scrutiny Panel identified how the Council might deal with both the opportunity and the threats posed by the review of housing finance. This will now be the subject of a report to Cabinet in February 2012 when a decision will be made of the future of council housing services in the New Forest.

It is noted that £153 million will be needed for the HRA self financing model, however part of these monies will be used to provide 60 homes in the first couple of years, with perhaps as many as 150-200 in the first 5 years.

1.2 Community Alarm Scheme

- **Could the Portfolio Holder provide some background as to the discretionary nature and objectives of this business area and an update on the future direction of the service?**

Portfolio Holder:

This service is discretionary but clearly provides essential support to the vulnerable within our communities. The objectives of the business are essentially to meet the needs of our elderly and vulnerable residents who want the security of a community alarm but also to aid people in remaining independent in the own homes for as long as possible.

We intend to review our current service in 2012, with an expectation of increasing turnover and profit in the future. We currently have approximately 2000 private sector clients who benefit from this service which generates a surplus of approximately £60K per annum.

1.3 Supporting People

- **Could the Portfolio Holder provide an update on the impending changes to the HCC Supporting People service within the New Forest?**

Portfolio Holder:

In essence the changes being proposed will mean that from April 2012 Hampshire County Council (HCC) will be selecting a new provider to provide support services to older people living in our sheltered schemes as well as for

those in need within the community. This will effectively mean that the Council's current sheltered housing service will end and a new floating support person based service will continue to provide housing related support to residents.

In addition the management of the current Tunstall alarm contract will also pass to HCC to be managed directly by them.

1.4 Enabling Role

- **Could the Portfolio Holder advise how this role is delivered and what assistance (financial or other) is given to partner agencies?**
- **How does the Council assess the impact of its activity in this area?**

Portfolio Holder:

The enabling role is performed by the Strategic Housing team and involves dealing with empty properties, working with partner agencies to develop affordable housing in the New Forest and managing the private sector leasing scheme.

In terms of assisting partner agencies we do this through operating a preferred Registered Partners list, ensuring that we work with 7 preferred housing associations. We assist housing association by advising on appropriate sites to develop and the type of housing required to meet the need of the local community. We also facilitate access to various departments within the Council, including Planning and Legal.

In 2010/11 we allocated £375,000 from the local authority social housing grant to enable and bring forward affordable housing.

Individual housing associations are responsible for impact assessments of individual development sites. An impact assessment for every resident in a new development is carried out 12 months following move in.

Essentially the impact is assessed by the numbers of new affordable housing units created annually.

1.5 Homelessness Assistance

- **Has the Council seen an increase in homelessness applications as a result of the current economic climate and could the Portfolio Holder detail the strategy for dealing with any increased pressure on the budget as a consequence?**
- **How does the Council assess the impact of its activity in this area i.e. the provision of temporary accommodation (Bed & Breakfast) and have other, potentially more efficient or effective, ways to assist people been explored?**

Portfolio Holder:

Homelessness applications and prevention work have not shown a significant increase, with the total of homeless households in recent years being relatively stable at between 350 and 385 households.

The continuing economic difficulties and significant changes to the housing benefit scheme (which will reduce benefit payments for many claimants in the next two years) are expected to put increased pressure on the service in the future.

With regard to budgets, the key cost is on the provision of Bed & Breakfast (B&B) accommodation and it is important to put in place measures to limit the use of B&B. These measures include robust homelessness assessments to ensure the Council limits the number of homelessness acceptances and making available other options instead of B&B.

There is a specific annual grant from central government for homelessness work. This has been increased from £56k to £78k in the expectation that homelessness will increase. Our experience is that the funding is best deployed on homelessness prevention work and the money is mainly used for loans to applicants for deposits to help them secure accommodation in the private rented sector. Deposits are returnable at the end of the tenancy and, in any case, applicants are required to make regular payments back to the Council during the lifetime of the tenancy. Careful management of the deposit scheme means that much of the homelessness grant can be recycled. The Council also supports the New Forest Night Stop scheme with a £15,000 grant and this scheme provides emergency accommodation for young homeless people which reduces B&B placements.

B&B is invariably the most expensive way of providing accommodation for homeless households so the focus is on securing alternatives which are more cost-effective. In addition to the deposit scheme and Night Stop, the Council now directly leases more than 80 properties from private owners and also works with other registered housing providers who manage leasing schemes. The Council is currently in discussion with other housing associations to extend the provision of leased accommodation and a site is being sought for the provision of a new purpose-built hostel.

When applicants are accepted as homeless and placed in temporary housing, they are required to register on the waiting list for permanent housing. Cases are managed to ensure homeless applicants move as quickly as possible into permanent housing, freeing up temporary housing.

1.6 Stillwater Park

- **Have the income generating opportunities regarding charges or increasing the number of mobile homes on the park been fully explored?**

Portfolio Holder:

Whilst there are a limited number of options in this regard, each has their own difficulties and there are no anticipated changes in the foreseeable future.

1.7 Sub-Standard Housing Including Slum Clearance

- **Given the economic situation has there been an impact on the Council in terms of monitoring or providing homes in multiple occupation?**

Portfolio Holder:

We have 39 active HMO's in our district and only 3 of these require a licence. They are all inspected on a regular basis and the economic situation does not appear to have caused any significant changes in this area of work.

1.8 CCTV

- **Could the Portfolio Holder provide an update on the future direction for this service in terms of expansion or reduction?**
- **Has the Council made provision for ongoing and future maintenance implications?**
- **We note that Town & Parishes contribute towards running costs and that income is received from Test Valley District Council for monitoring CCTV systems in Romsey. Are there any further opportunities for maximising or generating income?**

Portfolio Holder:

It is clear that for CCTV to survive in the current financial climate, the service has to develop into much more than a CCTV Control Room.

Reduction would mean losing CCTV cameras (therefore saving on transmission costs) and/or reducing staff and therefore reducing the control rooms 'manned hours'. This would have significant impact on residents on the New Forest, who in some particular areas feel 'comforted' by the presence of the cameras. The Police would also be affected as CCTV assists with approximately 1700 incidents over the course of the year.

The preferable option would be to expand using existing resources. Crucial services could be provided to private sector companies or other public bodies who are currently paying contractors for these services. NFDC's CCTV network is through BT fibre which gives flexibility in terms of expansion of the system. Other networks could easily be patched into our system to enable us to monitor 3rd party images.

Staff in the NFDC CCTV control room would welcome extra responsibilities and there is certainly scope within their job role to increase their work-load.

Initially, opportunities will be vigorously investigated and attempts will be made to set up contracts to generate income whilst still operating as a local authority control room. An income generating agreement is currently in place with Test Valley Council for us to monitor their cameras in Romsey. All other

opportunities to increase income or reduce costs will be explored as they arise.

In terms of maintenance the current agreement has less than 2 years to run. This agreement alongside the transmission contract will be looked at strategically to decide the best way forward.

1.9 Community Safety

- **The Council has always taken a positive role in improving community safety within the New Forest. Given all the changes how will this positive approach be continued?**
- **Are the impacts and outcomes of the service assessed in terms of value for money and have all funding opportunities been exploited? Has the effectiveness of the Community Safety Partnership been assessed and the roles of partners clear to avoid duplication?**

Portfolio Holder

This council has a very lean community safety resource. It consists of 1.5FTE ABC Co-ordinators, 1 FTE Community Safety Co-ordinator and a 0.5FTE administrative post.

Over the years the team has consistently achieved reductions in crime, anti social behaviour and fear of crime particularly through work that is targeted at identified increasing crime trends and geographical hotspots. I myself Chair the monthly Operational Joint Action Group that is partnership based and had been part of the reactive and excellent work that the partnership achieves; our team co-ordinates and enables many of those actions. I have also experienced firsthand the work of the ABC Co-ordinators and received excellent feedback from community and partners as to the reductions in behavioural issues identified.

Change is occurring but the community safety team is adapting to both crime changes and structural changes of our own authority and our partners and the approach remains positive.

Community safety work that is commissioned is evaluated against crime and anti-social behaviour data; the work undertaken to date shows decreased anti-social behaviour and decreased crime in the areas and on the crime types that the team has been tackling. As mentioned previously, these resources are very small and I believe demonstrate real value for money.

Community safety relies on grant funding for work that is commissioned outside of NFDC resources. Those funding sources are 'drying up' however we are actively engaged in influencing the commissioning structure at a force level in order to prepare appropriate bids for the incoming police and crime commissioner's consideration.

Until recently the Community Safety Partnership was required to submit extensive assessment and monitoring returns to the Home Office. That requirement has now been relaxed and the Safer New Forest strategy group assesses its effectiveness within the statutory annual strategic assessment.

I do not believe there is any duplication within the partners at the CSP and terms of reference set out the group structure and governance within the Statutory Hallmarks of a CSP.

1.10 Community Meals

- **Could the Portfolio Holder provide an update on the impending changes and recommendations for the future of this service?**

Portfolio Holder:

Hampshire County Council are working towards tendering the Meals on Wheels service with an anticipated start date of April 2013. Officers have been asked to review the continuation of subsidising this service and there has been an early indication that Districts may be asked to provide additional support to those people in receipt of meals on wheels but the exact nature of this support is not yet known.

1.11 Welfare Funerals

- **Could the Portfolio Holder provide an update on the future direction of this service and whether the economic climate has had an impact on the provision of welfare funerals?**

Portfolio Holder:

The service for providing funerals is currently out to tender to ensure the best value for money.

Questions for Portfolio Holder

Planning & Transportation Portfolio

1. Portfolio Specific

1.1 Planning Fee Income

- **We understand that the Government is providing more flexibility to what is charged and that the Council has set up a Task and Finish Group to look at it. Can you please provide an update on the likely outcome including the scale of financial benefit?**

Portfolio Holder:

The original impression given by the Government was that local authorities would have more control over the setting of planning fees but the Government is conscious not to stunt development so there is a delay in guidance and currently we do not know. Other activity has taken place to review income and it is likely that the Council will generate an additional £75,000 by making a modest charge for pre application advice and issuing certificates of lawful development in line with the advice given. This arrangement is reflected in a number of local authorities and will bring the Council more into line with others. Charging for advice in relation to listed buildings will also be considered and large applications will be treated on a case by case basis.

This will be a Portfolio Holder decision and the impact of charging in terms of unlawful development and associated enforcement costs will be kept under review.

Due to the economic slowdown Building Regulations income is predicted to be approximately £50,000 under budget this year and charges will be increased by 15% to counter ongoing losses.

The budget requirement in respect of planning fee income will be met for 2011/12 and 2012/13.

1.2 Planning General

- **We note the close working relationship with the New Forest National Park Authority. Are further opportunities for the two organisations to work more collaboratively being explored for example by using shared planning ICT systems?**

Portfolio Holder:

The Council is keen to work in partnership and there are significant advantages to sharing planning resources including ICT. Where opportunities exist they have been explored and consideration is currently being given to jointly resourcing specialist planning advice and sharing the tree service.

1.3 Land Charges

- **We have heard that the Council's ability to charge for Land Charges searches is being challenged. Can the Portfolio Holder provide an update on the current position?**

Portfolio Holder:

The Council provides a commercial service for land charges searches in competition with the private sector. The level of resources have been reviewed over the past three to four years and reduced in line with the decline in search applications. In order to maintain the level of service and the timeliness of searches there is little scope to reduce costs further.

1.4 Parking

- **We note the recent changes to parking charges but could the Portfolio Holder provide an update as to the Council's future strategy towards parking across the district?**

Portfolio Holder:

The increase in business rates and VAT and a shortfall in pay and display visitors is likely to result in a £340,000 deficit for the year. In 2012/12 business rate costs are expected to increase by a further £90,000, but the overall expected budgetary shortfall in 2012/13 (including business rate costs) will be offset by the changes implemented now. Further steps may have to be taken as another business rate increase of £60,000 is expected after 2012/13.

A Task and Finish Group has been established to review free car parks with a view to recouping costs. The review is ongoing but is likely to recommend that business rates are recovered for free car parks in the future resulting in additional income of approximately £50,000. The cost of enforcement activity has also been reviewed resulting in savings in resources and travelling costs of approximately £92,000.

Consideration has been given to undertaking a review of on-street parking enforcement through a Task and Finish Group but this has not as yet been established.

1.5 Public Lighting

- **Could the Portfolio Holder provide an update on the benefits derived from the Hampshire County Council private finance initiative (PFI)**
- **We note that "night time dimming" reduces energy consumption but have (or will) financial savings also been derived?**

Portfolio Holder:

The PFI has resulted in a £60,000 saving per annum for the Council in reduced costs relating to maintenance, electricity and capital outlay for replacement.

Any savings from “night time dimming” are likely to be offset by future increases in energy costs.

1.6 Highways

- **Could the Portfolio Holder provide come background on the agency arrangements with Hampshire County Council and an update on any impending changes that may have a budgetary impact on the district council?**

Portfolio Holder:

The Council undertakes minor highways work on behalf of Hampshire County Council. This is funded by a budget of £90,000 from the County Council and the use of some Section 106 monies. There is a modest cost to this Council but both authorities are content with the arrangement.