



Report of Review Panels for 2005/06



REPORT OF THE REVIEW PANELS FOR 2005/06

1.0 OVERVIEW

This year the structural changes to the operation of the Review Panels introduced in 2004/05 have started to bear fruit. All of the Panels have enjoyed a productive year, and a number of significant reports have been prepared, taking forward recommendations to the Cabinet, Portfolio Holders and also partner organisations. There has been a noticeable shift in the Panels' agendas from the position where much of the Panels' time was taken up by briefings and "for information" reports, to a more disciplined approach where the Panels are concentrating on focussed reviews with defined objectives. Use of small task and finish working groups has continued and this has proved effective in allowing in-depth assimilation of information by a small number of members for reporting back to the Panels.

As a result of this more focussed approach, there have been a number of notable successes from the Panel's work. Recent examples include the review of procurement by the Corporate Review Panel, which made detailed recommendations for change, including amendments to Standing Orders and Delegations. The Cabinet commended the Panel for this work when they adopted their recommendations their meeting on 5 April. Another piece of work that was particularly commended by the Cabinet was the formulation of a response, by the Health, Housing and Social Inclusion Review Panel, to the consultation paper on proposed changes to Health Service structures. Panel members were very pro-active in attending the briefing meetings, developing a knowledge base, and creating the response.

Each of the panels is developing methods of operation and agreeing work programmes that allow them to select and review topic areas where members feel that they can make a difference to the outcome. As a result, a number of valuable topic areas have been examined – these are detailed in the synopsis of the work of each Panel that follows.

2.0 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT.

This has been the first full year of operation of the revised performance management system, which relies on the development of a strong role for lead scrutiny members. Two lead scrutiny members have been appointed to each service area and they are becoming increasingly involved with the services to which they have been allocated, in particular with the review and preparation of service plans. Lead scrutiny members are holding meetings with Service Heads and good practice in this respect is starting to emerge. It is hoped that all lead scrutiny members will build on developments to date, to monitor performance regularly during the year and to identify any possible problems or spending requirements. The proposed publication by the Council of a members' guide to performance management will assist them in this regard.

Under the Council's performance management framework, service plans are the building blocks for setting the Council's key targets and for allocating resources. The role of the lead scrutiny members in contributing to services' action/improvement plans, which in turn feed into the setting of corporate key targets, is vital. The members who have been appointed as lead scrutiny members have found their involvement with services useful and informative.

Each Panel receives an annual summary of performance against key targets, with an explanation if a target has not been met. This allows members to challenge whether reasons for missed targets are justified and, in the longer term, will help members to form a view about trends of performance in various service areas. In accordance with its specific remit, the Corporate Overview Panel has considered the Council's overall performance against the Corporate Plan.

At present not all Review Panel members are actively involved in the lead scrutiny member process. As the role develops and becomes more complex, it may be necessary to review workloads and perhaps involve a wider range of members, each with more defined subject areas.

3.0 EXPENDITURE PLANS.

The Panels are engaging in the expenditure plan process to differing degrees, as they continue to develop their roles. The Panels receive draft expenditure plan proposals in November, for comment to the Cabinet. Views have been expressed that the expenditure plan proposals are well developed before the Panels' views are formally sought, and that the scope for the Panels to make a difference is limited. However, it remains open to all Panels to consider spending proposals at any stage during the year. Two Panels, notably the Corporate Overview Panel (which is encouraging their lead scrutiny members to include expenditure plan issues as part of their engagement with service areas throughout the year) and the Leisure Review Panel (which is taking a more widely based approach and will be looking at the use of resources overall, including expenditure), are actively pursuing greater involvement in budgets outside of the formal expenditure plan process.

Major reviews that are carried out by the Panels have the potential to generate expenditure plan proposals and are another way in which the Panels may directly influence future spending proposals. The Crime and Disorder Review Panel managed to achieve a saving as a direct result of its review of domestic violence, while other recommendations emanating from Panels have cost implications that feed into expenditure plan proposals.

4.0 TRAINING

During 2004/05 Panel members received extensive training to improve their performance through the review panels. This year's training has built on that. There was a well-received session on how to chair scrutiny meetings to maximise their effectiveness. This session was open to Chairmen, Vice-Chairmen and Opposition Group Spokespersons on each Panel. Representatives from neighbouring authorities were also invited and the interaction between members of the different authorities proved beneficial. The emerging role of lead scrutiny members was also supported by specific training on performance management.

Members have also had access to other training events to maintain and develop their knowledge base in the subject areas that they are reviewing. The Chairman of the Corporate Overview Panel, Cllr John Ward, attends meetings of the South East Employers' Members Scrutiny Network.

5.0 CALL INS.

Once again, there have been a limited number of call-ins during the current year. There is no increasing trend. In general terms, more contentious decisions are the subject of consultations between the Portfolio Holder and the Panel before a decision is taken, which removes any subsequent need for the issue to be called in.

To date, the call-ins have not had any significant influence on the decisions that were being questioned. In some cases, the Panel have not recommended any change, having heard in greater detail the rationale behind the decision. In other cases, the Panel's views have not been accepted by the Cabinet.

6.0 FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS FOR SCRUTINY

Apart from this annual report, there is no established mechanism across all Panels for assessing how effective reviews have been, for assessing whether Panels have “ added value” , or for drawing learning points from the experiences of the Panels in undertaking each review. The Leisure Review Panel has recently appointed members to examine the outcomes of earlier reviews, while the Environment Review Panel will look at the outcome of their reviews of cemeteries and public conveniences at a meeting in the autumn.

Members might wish to explore ways that would allow Panels to pool ideas and develop best practice.

CLLR J G WARD

CHAIRMAN, CORPORATE OVERVIEW PANEL



CRIME AND DISORDER

REVIEW PANEL 2005/06

1.0 MAJOR REVIEWS

1.1 **Domestic Violence**

This was a major review that was carried out by a task and finish working group whose membership was Cllrs Hibbert, Francis, Penwarden, and Pemberton. Members undertook extensive research into the general subject area of domestic violence as the original intention was to carry out a very wide ranging review, with the first stage only being the role of the Domestic Violence Co-ordinator and whether this Council, which then paid 75% of the cost of the post, was receiving value for money.

The review was extensively supported by the Police, who also partly funded the post and by officers within this authority.

The Working Group submitted a detailed report to the Panel, which considered their findings at a special meeting on 18 October 2005. A number of recommendations were made to the Portfolio Holder. One positive result was that the police agreed to fund a greater proportion (50%) of the cost of the post, resulting in a saving for this Council. The study also highlighted the need for the establishment of proper performance indicators for the post, a need that was agreed by the police.

The review did however highlight a number of practical problems for members wishing to take a pro-active role in researching, for themselves, a complex area of operations such as this. In particular the Court Justice system had no mechanism to discriminate domestic violence cases from other violence cases. This complicated things for Members, making the task quite onerous and very time consuming. There were also some difficulties in undertaking a review on a service whose line management was not based within this organisation, as there were differences of perception as to the purpose and scope of the review. Overall, although the study produced some interesting and helpful suggestions, the experience was not perceived as being wholly positive by the Members and Officers (from this authority and the Police) who took

part. As a consequence, other work which was planned within the subject area of domestic violence has not been progressed at this stage. The positive outcome of the research is that it has stimulated action by both the Police and the Court Justice System, to resolve the gaps identified in their performance monitoring of Domestic Violence.

1.2 Accredited Community Safety Officers

The Panel have maintained an overview of the operation of the County Council's Accredited Community Safety Officer (ACSO) scheme, which is being piloted in 2 areas within the New Forest District. In addition to the officers employed solely by the County Council, this Council have funded 90% of the cost of 2 additional ACSO's based in New Milton. The Panel are anxious to ensure that this Council is receiving value for money for the expenditure.

The Panel, and the Portfolio Holder, share a number of concerns about the operational arrangements for the ACSO's. Of particular concern is the amount of time spent travelling from the depot where the vans are stored to the actual beat area. The Panel also have some concerns that this Council has not received proper benefit for the expenditure on 2 additional ACSO's, as a result of long term sickness. The officers have been working with the County Council on the development of suitable performance indicators, but this has not yet been completed. In the meantime, the Panel continue to receive regular reports on the ACSO's activities, in order to develop an overall view on their role and effectiveness. A number of Members also accompanied the ACSO's on patrol, to gain a wider understanding of their role and capabilities.

1.3 Fear of Crime

This is an extensive area of work which is currently being carried out by a task and finish working group. As part of the research that Members are carrying out, they participated in the development of questions to be asked of the Citizen's Panel. The research is designed to identify factors which increase perceptions of fear of crime, and how these factors may be mitigated and resolved. The questions have been carefully designed to avoid enhancing the Fear of Crime and will be passed to the Citizens Panel in the near future.

2.0 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

2.1 Service Performance

The role of Lead Scrutiny Members has continued to be a bit problematic for the Panel. Much of the work in this subject area is carried out in partnership with other organisations, and not within the direct control of this organisation. This has made it hard for the Lead Scrutiny Members to perceive a role for themselves. This is not an active area of work within the Panel's business and no issues have been brought forward by the Lead Scrutiny Members, for the attention of the Panel.

2.2 CCTV Performance Monitoring

The Panel are keen to identify measures of the effectiveness of the CCTV system in addressing crime and anti-social behaviour, and also in public perceptions of safety. Consequently, the Panel have come back to this issue several times during the year. Panel members receive, each month, a summary of activity and types of incident to maintain a watching brief, but the problem remains the ability to translate this into a measurable difference as a result of the CCTV system. In January this year the Panel received a further report, which included a summary of a study commissioned by the Home Office, by a group of data analysts, on 14 case studies. They had concluded

that the impact of a CCTV system was variable and at best worked with other systems to bring about changes. Only 2 of the case studies had a statistically significant effect of crime levels and both involved a large number of cameras. The Panel will continue to pursue this issue, with the CCTV and Licensing Manager now seeking locally collected statistics through the local Crime Analyst, who is employed by the Community Safety Partnership.

3.0 TOPICS WHERE INFORMATION WAS GATHERED

3.1 Young Firesetters Project. - this project is co-ordinated by Hampshire Fire and Rescue's Community Fire Safety Unit.

3.2 Anti-social Behaviour Orders and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts – numbers being served and effectiveness of these and other measures in addressing anti-social behaviour.

3.3 Problem Resolution in a Multi-Agency Environment (PRIME)

3.4 Civil Contingencies Act – Service Level Agreement for the County Council to undertake this Council's responsibilities.

3.5 Emergency Planning Exercise

3.6 Contingency planning for Avian Flu outbreak

4.0 CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

The past year has been a very active period for the Panel particularly for those members involved in the Domestic Violence and Fear of Crime Sub Panels. Both Sub Panels have worked very hard to achieve results in areas where there is often a considerable crossover with other organisations. A new relationship which developed from the Domestic Violence Panel has been to provide a temporary Chairman for the New Forest Domestic Violence Forum to try to resolve their organisational difficulties. This is intended to be a short term solution until they are self sufficient again. The Domestic Violence Sub Panel believes the Forum provides a very important communication group for the front line staff in Domestic Violence field. A second consequence from the Domestic Violence Sub Panel has been the creation of a Domestic Violence Strategy Panel whose members are drawn from the membership of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership at a more senior level. These partnership members have the ability to allocate resources to target specific domestic violence issues identified by the Domestic Violence Forum. The Strategy Panel is quite new and its first meeting was very successful. It is felt that it will provide a real force for improvement in the support mechanisms for Domestic Violence occurrences in the New Forest District.

Fear of Crime is still at a fairly early stage but it is also looking at NFDC publications with a view to improving their content to reduce the impact of crime perception.

As mentioned in the report, we have some concerns with the current ACSO situation but we are exploring the area of service level agreements, via the Officers, between NFDC and HCC. With regard to CCTV it seems exceedingly difficult to identify reductions in Crime due to the success or otherwise of CCTV. The CCTV System has certainly provided very valuable information, especially in a recent case of a Police officer being attacked, but of course it cannot practically cover all locations. It is a general belief by the Panel that, like ACSOs, CCTV adds to the reduction of crime and also reduces the fear of crime. It seems unlikely that conclusive proof can ever be

demonstrated in terms of performance indicators for either. However the fact that they are both present can only help public confidence that there is a mechanism to minimise crime, especially the general street crime and anti-social behaviour, with the corresponding reduction in fear of crime. This will perhaps be reflected in future responses to questions promulgated via the Citizens Panel.

A member of the panel participated in the recent Emergency Planning exercise for a Nuclear Event (Nuclear Submarine accident) in Southampton, a co-ordinated multi agency event including NFDC, which was very successful and all participants were very happy with results.

For the future we intend to look in detail at Crime and Disorder related performance indicators, with the emphasis on those that we believe are practical and relevant to the Panel. The Fear of Crime Sub Panel will be progressed and we will maintain our watching brief on ACSOs and CCTV. On Domestic Violence we intend to follow through on the DV Forum Chairmanship in the short term and maintain a long term participation as part of the Domestic Violence Strategy Panel.

Cllr J Penwarden

Chairman, Crime and Disorder Review Panel



CORPORATE OVERVIEW PANEL (COP) – 2005/06

1.0 MAJOR REVIEWS

1.1 **Review of Procurement Issues**

The Panel's major reviews this year have been undertaken by working groups:

- The Capital Project Sub Group – to look at Project Management and ways of avoiding slippage
- The Contractual Issues Sub Group – to review Standing Orders and Financial Regulations
- The Procurement Sub Group – to look at Strategy and Process and Capital.

These working groups, led by the Chairman, Cllr Ward, and assisted by Councillors Baker and Neath, together with officers, looked at:

- The causes for Capital Slippage
- Contractual Issues relating to Capital schemes
- Increased costs against the original budget
- Ways to ensure that approval processes are robust and contain appropriate thresholds
- Ways, within a legal framework, of encouraging more local businesses to seek contracts with the Council.

A Project Board was set up to oversee the work of the above groups.

Interim updates and scoping reports were regularly considered throughout the year, and the findings were reported to the March 2006 COP meeting. The findings consisted of recommendations including production of Revised Standing Orders and Users Guide, Revised Financial Regulations, a Desk Guide to Purchasing and a Draft Project Management Guide. These were all agreed by the Cabinet, which commended the Panel for its work.

It is felt this work was a significant step forward in facilitating improvements in the management of Council projects, and will have a positive impact on the way the Council conducts and monitors its procurement activities, as well as providing greater scope for local business to seek contracts with the Council.

2.0 OTHER ISSUES WHERE AN ISSUE WAS CONSIDERED OR INFORMATION GATHERED

2.1 Expenditure Plan 2006/07

On two occasions in considering the Expenditure Plan papers for 2006/07 and beyond, the Panel made a number of comments on improving the content of the budget documentation, the process, and member input. As well as requiring possible modifications to future budget reports, the Panel recognised that there was a need for Lead Scrutiny Members to engage more fully in the budget process throughout the year, in order to maintain supervision of financial issues surrounding their respective services.

The Panel has recently asked the Director of Resources to ensure that future budget reports to Review Panels include a breakdown of their respective ICT costs.

2.2 Review of Catering (Minor Review)

The Panel asked for a report on the Council's catering outlets so that it could consider whether to undertake a major review of the topic. Councillors Ward and Robinson held a series of meetings with officers. One of the points of concern had been the number of significant supplementary estimate requests that had been submitted over a 12 months period for catering.

Members examined the reasons for these, and reviewed the operational arrangements relating to various Council sites.

After reviewing the position in detail it was concluded that there was no need for major change, except for the installation of vending machines in appropriate public places, and that the situation should be reviewed in 18-24 months time.

2.3 Citizen's Advice Bureau / Community First

The Panel has received detailed presentations from the above organisations on their work and future direction. The Council gives significant grant aid to these organisations and it served as a good reminder of the extent of services provided.

2.4 Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)

The Panel has received a Government consultation paper on the future of LSP's, their governance, accountability and capacity to deliver strategies.

Members discussed the proposed response to the consultation document with the Chairman of the LSP. The Panel welcomed the proposals and hoped they would better enable LSP's to 'make things happen'.

2.5 Affordable Housing

The Panel has, examined the issue of capital funding available for affordable housing, particularly for new social housing build. Consideration was given towards identifying further sources of funds, perhaps from budgets other than the Housing budget.

It was recognised that the provision of additional affordable housing was currently one of this Council's key corporate priorities and is the Council's top strategic housing priority. Although current targets for new provision were being met, affordable housing was, for reasons of limited finance and land supply, becoming increasingly

difficult to achieve and the situation was likely to worsen in the coming years unless action was taken.

The Panel will receive a further, more detailed report on the matter, when it can be considered in the context of the Council's review of its Corporate Plan.

2.6 Performance Management

The Panel has continued to help implement the Council's Performance Management System through:

- (a) using lead scrutiny members (as in other panels) to work alongside, and report on, the nine services it covers;
- (b) establishing a clear timetable of performance management activity to strengthen the link between corporate, service and financial planning;
- (c) using the Council's Performance Plan and subsequent exception reports to monitor the Council's overall performance;
- (d) mapping the Council's key targets against the Corporate Plan to ensure all corporate aims including priorities are appropriately covered; and
- (e) considering key results from, and inputting into, the Council's programme of corporate consultations.

2.7 Rural Assistance Grants

Following reference of this issue to the Corporate Overview Panel for deliberation, the Panel has had a preliminary examination of the grants scheme and were broadly in agreement with it. Officers were subsequently asked to draw up a list of options and report to a future meeting of Corporate Overview Panel, which is likely to be June 2006.

2.8 Treasury Management Reports

The Panel continues to receive regular reports on the Council's borrowing and investment activities that are submitted in accordance with the Treasury Management Code of Practice, together with information on interest earnings on managed funds.

The Panel has recently noted that £6.5 million which was currently managed by external fund managers was being withdrawn from those fund managers and would be brought back in-house to be managed by the Council.

3.0 WORK PROGRAMME

As well as continuing to undertake its key role in financial and performance monitoring, further work is expected on procurement and affordable housing, in the context of the overall Corporate Plan together with other projects.

The Panel is making increasing use of its Lead Scrutiny Members as a resource for overseeing its Services. There is still a feeling that the Panel's role in budget monitoring has room for improvement and it may be that the Panel will need to ask for amendments to reporting formats and processes.

It is in any case anticipated that the year ahead will see greater emphasis on Lead Scrutiny Members having a more proactive and continuous role in budget monitoring in liaison with their service heads.

4.0 CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

This year, the first full year following the changes in Scrutiny arrangements in 2004 which saw this Panel formed, has seen a greater reliance on the Lead Scrutiny Members to undertake the much of the routine work around the nine services it is responsible for. The number of services is so high (most other panels only have 1 or two services) it is essential in my opinion for the work of the Lead Scrutiny system be reinforced.

Details of aspects of the panel's work is shown in the report above, but I must make special mention of the Review of Procurement which has continued during the year, and will continue into next year. A particularly pleasing aspect this review was the interaction between members and officers to undertake the work. All too often in the past, Officers have created reports before Members had any input, and all too often the report was rubber-stamped with minimal intervention or input. The procurement project itself involved Members and Officers during the review itself and I feel that this work was a significant change in the process in undertaking this type of project.

Finally I thank Andy Rogers, the Committee Administrator for the Panel.

Cllr J G Ward

Chairman, Corporate Overview Panel



ECONOMY AND PLANNING REVIEW PANEL

1.0 MAJOR REVIEWS

1.1 **Housing Design, Density and Character (Draft Supplementary Planning Document)**

This topic has been a continuing feature of the Panel's work over the last year or so. As early as November 2004, the Panel had recognised the need to examine the way in which higher density development could be achieved in a sympathetic way in urban areas while protecting greenfield sites.

In January 2005 the Panel considered presentations on issues concerning the achievement of house building targets in urban sites and their successful integration. Officers then undertook to ensure that future reports to Planning Development Control Committee, and more particularly in respect of environmentally significant developments, would ascertain whether applicants properly analysed the existing character of the area and assess how the proposed development affects the character of the surrounding area. It was agreed that appropriate additional guidance would be included in the local development scheme.

The Panel then considered draft supplementary planning guidance (SPD) on the design of new housing, including consideration of density and character. The Council's Local Development Scheme 2005 included the production of this document. The new guidance was likely to require developers for all or most new housing development to submit a design statement and planning applications would not be registered if this was not supplied.

The draft SPD was approved for public consultation the results of which were reported to the Panel in January 2006. Present at the meeting were Keith Leaman, Chairman of the Architects Panel, and Magnus Strom of the Architects Panel. Both emphasised the importance of the Council promoting dialogue at an early stage between developers and planning officers. Members felt that this might help to contribute to better

applications and fewer appeals, although it was acknowledged that there was currently a limited resource for this service. The Panel sought to address this resource issue by recommending a budget bid to Cabinet, with caveats relating to charges and reclaiming costs.

The architects pointed out that very few authorities had produced a similar document and in their view, the Council was leading the way.

The Panel supported the recommended modifications which had been compiled to reflect consultation feedback. The SPD will be submitted to Cabinet for agreement.

It is felt this project, which was initiated and overseen by this Panel is a good example of scrutiny working to produce positive changes to policy, based on identified problems in the context of local circumstances.

1.2 Car Parking Design

Another smaller project, initiated by the Panel in 2004, focused on design guidance for car parking in higher density residential developments.

Much work was undertaken on the topic, culminating in a member / officer working group meeting to discuss these issues being held in July 2005. The document has since been reviewed by the Panel and refined. This informal advice note is to be used to assist in discussions with respective applicants and would be included in the draft supplementary planning document "Housing Design, Density and Character.

1.3 Economic Strategy

In September 2005, the Panel discussed key issues to be addressed in preparing the Council's economic development strategy. Roger Tyms and Partners, Consultants, were in attendance to give a presentation on the methodology of the study, together with Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the New Forest Business Partnership. The Panel considered various issues and a number of points were raised and were brought into the study. The Panel have received regular updates on progress throughout 2005 and early 2006.

The Consultants had made a presentation to the Board of the New Forest Business Partnership and were involved in the employment land review / economic strategy workshop which took place on 17 November, which many Panel members attended.

The Cabinet meeting in April will be asked to agree the document for consultation. The Panel will receive the consultation results in September, prior to a final report to Cabinet in November.

1.4 Car Parking Standards Review – Preliminary Report

Over the course of various meetings members have considered a detailed review of the Council's current parking limit standards for both residential and non-residential development.

Whilst a further report will be made to the Panel at its June 2006 meeting, perhaps in tandem with an expected report on traffic management strategy, there were a number of interim recommendations made by the Panel.

2.0 OTHER ITEMS WHERE AN ISSUE WAS CONSIDERED OR INFORMATION GATHERED

2.1 National Park

The Panel has had as a standing agenda item an update on the current implications of the National Park with close monitoring of financial and employee aspects.

2.2 Policy documents considered/individual items dealt with by the Panel

Other issues considered by the Panel over the year include :

- Planning Policy Statement 1 : Delivering Sustainable Development (New Planning Guidance)
- Draft Supplementary Document - The Delivery of Affordable Housing (on Development Sites through the Planning Process)
- "Where shall we live" - District Housebuilding targets for South East Plan
- Consultation on Draft Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 3 : Housing
- Planning Gain Supplement : Consultation from HM Treasury
- Enforcement monitoring
- Applicants' satisfaction levels with planning service
- Economic Development Service Plan 2005/06 (Progress) (The Lead Scrutiny Members for economic development were given a standing invitation to attend the Business Partnership meetings as observers)
- Young Peoples' Panel Survey Results on "Your Career"
- Key Achievements 2005/06 and Key Targets 2006/07
- Validation of Planning Applications

3.0 WORK PROGRAMME / SCOPING TEMPLATE

As well as dealing with the major reviews, various consultation papers and other items, the Panel has been making significant strides towards focusing its resources on a smaller number of planned projects. The aim is to concentrate its efforts and produce more worthwhile outputs.

In pursuance of this, Economy and Planning is the first Review Panel to introduce the use of a suggested standard checklist for scoping new Panel projects. It has been agreed that this form would be completed whenever a new project was suggested, so that tasks are properly planned and achieve the best possible end results. It is hoped that more use can be made of the template and that it will be adopted by other Panels in due course.

4.0 CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Having accepted the advice received during the seminar on Project Management given by Frances Taylor of the Institute of Local Government Studies attended by many members of this Review Panel last year, the Chairman remains committed to the intentions, set out in paragraphs 7.1 and 7.2 above, to focus on fewer projects but in greater depth.

Cllr K F Ault

Chairman, Economy and Planning Review Panel



ENVIRONMENT

REVIEW PANEL 2005/06

1.0 MAJOR REVIEWS

1.1 Air Quality Management Areas

The Panel has kept under review the work which has been done to declare 3 Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA's) in the District. Two of the AQMA's relate to nitrogen dioxide as a result of standing and congested traffic. These are the High Street, Lyndhurst and Junction Road Totton. In addition, a further AQMA has been declared for sulphur dioxide around Fawley village. The Fawley AQMA already has a well-developed action plan, and work with the Refinery, who are the main source of the pollutant, has so far proved effective in finding a solution. The formulation of action plans for Lyndhurst and Totton has proved to be much more complex, involving the County Council and local Councils to a much greater degree.

1.2 Cemeteries Service

A task and finish working group comprising Councillors Woods, Ford and Humber undertook research into a number of problems arising from the operation of the Council's cemeteries. This work had been initiated at the request of the Portfolio Holder who wanted advice before addressing some very difficult and sensitive issues. The Panel made a number of recommendations relating to the operation of lawn cemeteries and also for the testing of safety of headstones. The recommendations included establishing a select list of contractors who are authorised to work in the Council's cemeteries. The recommendations were subsequently adopted by the Cabinet.

1.3 Garden Waste Collection Scheme

The Panel has been monitoring the introduction of the Garden Waste Collection scheme and supported its extension to cover the entire District. The service has

managed to operate within the defined budget. The principle of the service is becoming increasingly supported and appreciated by the public. The Panel have also ensured that the continued promotion of composting bins has encouraged householders to compost as much vegetable matters as possible at home. Anecdotal evidence from workshops etc suggests that the main market for the garden waste collection scheme remains the material that would have been disposed of through the grey sack scheme.

1.4 Refuse Collection and Recycling

The Panel have a standing working party that works on a variety of recycling and waste minimisation ideas. At the moment, however, the Portfolio Holder is engaged in fundamental research and a review of potential waste collection systems. Not only is this work resource intensive, but it may change the context within which any ideas generated by the working party would operate. As a consequence, it has been decided that it is not practical to continue with this area of work until the more fundamental decisions, that will follow on from the Portfolio Holder's research, have been taken.

1.5 Materials Recycling Facilities

The Panel are concerned that the Materials Recycling Facilities (MRFs) are unable to properly support the recycling activities of this Council and, as a consequence, a high proportion of clear recycling sacks have been rejected, with insufficient justification. The Panel visited the Alton MRF to improve their understanding of the issues, and have asked the officers to continue to make representations through the Project Integra Management Board and Scrutiny Committee.

1.6 Rodent Control – Effects of Charging for Treatment of Infestations

This issue was brought to the attention of the Panel by a public participant who was concerned that rodent populations were increasing as householders were deciding they were not prepared to pay to have infestations treated. The Panel received detailed information on the practice elsewhere, the effect of the introduction of charges on the number of treatments, and also the advice of the Institute of Environmental Health Officers on best practice. Some members felt that they would like additional research to be carried out, and appointed a small task and finish working group to progress the research. The working group have not however found it possible to progress this issue, at this time. The Panel have now decided to make no recommendations to change the practice of charging to treat rodent infestations but to maintain a watching brief for any evidence that rodent populations are increasing.

The water authorities have been lobbied to adopt a pro-active approach to baiting sewers to prevent them providing a haven for rat infestations. It is hoped that continued lobbying will secure budget provision by the Water Authorities for routine baiting from next year.

1.7 Public Conveniences

This was another area of work that was carried out at the request of the Portfolio Holder. Members reviewed the usage levels of a number of public conveniences across the District and also the programme for major renovation and replacement. The Panel was satisfied that the usage levels no longer justified the expense of maintaining some conveniences and made recommendations about the way forward for a number of sites. In addition, the Panel recommended that the programme of renovation and replacement should be radically altered to allow the early replacement of the conveniences in the car park at Ringwood, which were the most frequent source of complaints from members of the public. These recommendations were subsequently adopted by the Cabinet.

2.0 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

2.1 Food Safety Service Plan

The Panel review, on an annual basis, the Food Safety Service Plan. This year, the Panel noted the difficulty in recruiting and retaining suitably qualified officers and the problems that this was causing in delivering the service. This issue was brought to the attention of the Portfolio Holder.

2.2 Service Performance – 2004/05

The Panel reviewed performance against a number of performance indicators for the refuse collection, recycling and street cleansing areas of activity.

The Lead Scrutiny Members have held regular meetings with Service Heads, but have not found it necessary to report any items to the Panel for further attention.

3.0 TOPICS WHERE INFORMATION WAS GATHERED

Marchwood Energy Recovery Facility.

Contaminated Land – role of the Local Planning Authority in meeting the Council's obligation to address contamination of land.

Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act.

Safer Foods Better Business – changes to food safety legislation.

4.0 CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

As can be seen from the above, this Panel has had an exceptionally busy year with several important reviews. Members had the opportunity to visit various establishments and this has assisted them in formulating their opinions for discussion at the Panel. The Cemetery Review was a particularly sensitive issue and I felt that this matter was dealt with in a well thought out manner with due regard for all parties involved. The garden waste scheme is proving successful and with the whole District now participating, next year should see a significant increase in our recycling figures. There has been some concern regarding the number of clear sacks that have been rejected by the Alton MRF and this will be further investigated in the coming year. Refuse collection is the subject of a Working Party and the recently formed Project Board on the method of collection will have significant input in the coming year. Members will be aware of the commitment of this Council to continue to follow a programme of replacement or refurbishment of the District Council toilets; this will mean in some cases the closure of some of those toilets which show a level of low usage.

I am also pleased to report that our Lead Scrutiny Members have been very much involved with the training and development work which has been carried out by the Food Safety team to help small businesses, particularly catering companies, respond to new food safety legislation. Their active support, including attendance at training seminars, has been much appreciated.

I close these comments by stating my regard and thanks for all the officers that this Review Panel has worked with during the year. Without exception all have shown a completely professional approach and high standard of work with whatever task they have been given.

Cllr P R Woods

Chairman, Environment Review Panel



HOUSING, HEALTH AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

REVIEW PANEL 2005/06

1.0 MAJOR REVIEWS

1.1 **Delivery of Affordable Housing through the Planning Process**

The issue of affordable housing is one which has gathered increasing attention over the last year and has become a key priority of the Council. As part of its ongoing programme to review this matter, a joint meeting with the Economy and Planning Review Panel considered the draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) "The Delivery of Affordable Housing Through the Planning Process" prior to public consultation. Members felt that affordable housing sites should be evenly distributed with no more than 10 dwellings per site, and that developers should be encouraged to provide more environmentally friendly houses.

The Panel has also reviewed the current means of achieving affordable housing provision with the District and the difficulties being faced in relation to both a reducing financial allocation and increasing housing need and considered options for dealing with these issues in the future. The Review Panel will continue to examine this issue on a regular basis.

1.2 **Meals on Wheels**

As part of its scrutiny role the Panel has been regularly reviewing the progress made on the Meals on Wheels Review, and assessed its findings in Autumn 2005. Members were mindful of the needs of service users, however they recognised that a more cost effective service could be better provided through Social Services. Following recommendations from the Review Panel the Cabinet decided to the outsourcing of the provision of Meals on Wheels for the New Forest District Council to a catering business of Hampshire County Council.

1.3 Primary Care Trust/Strategic Health Authority/Ambulance Trust – Consultation on Reconfiguration

The Review Panel held a special meeting to discuss the Council's response to the Primary Care Trust/Strategic Health Authority/Ambulance Trust reconfiguration consultation documents. The meeting generated good debate about the proposed changes and the need to maintain effective relationships within the District. It was felt that the needs of the local communities within the District need to be recognised and that services should be targeted accordingly. Recommendations to the Cabinet included the preferred one Primary Care Trust option but maintained that the interests of the District should be preserved whatever structure was put in place.

2.0 OTHER ITEMS WHERE AN ISSUE WAS CONSIDERED OR INFORMATION GATHERED

2.1 Dentistry

The Review Panel invited an expert in dentistry from the New Forest Primary Care Trust to present on the issues facing dentistry within the district. This presentation was the first in a series of thematic presentations given by external witnesses to the Review Panel. The New Forest had been identified as one of 16 areas within England experiencing severe problems with NHS dental access, with only 24% of adults in this area currently having an NHS dentist compared to 45% nationally. The local Primary Care Trust is in the progress of preparing a Dental Action Plan, addressing issues of shortages, which the Review Panel will review in summer 2006.

2.2 Public Health White Paper

Through a small member officer working group, the Panel has continued to evaluate how the Public Health White Paper, "Choosing Health – Making Healthy Choices Easier" (The White Paper) will make a positive impact on the local community. The working group has worked hard to determine the level of understanding of the White Paper, and commissioned a questionnaire, which was circulated to NFDC and Local Strategic Partnership employees. The findings of the survey highlighted a general knowledge gap, particularly amongst NFDC workers. The Panel has recommended that internal awareness sessions through a newly formed group be undertaken to address this issue. The study of the White Paper has also helped to formulate questions for input into the Citizens' Panel Health questionnaire.

2.3 Housing Benefit and CAB relationships with the Housing Service

As a further step in evaluating the working relationships of the housing service with other agencies including other services within the Council, the Panel invited Citizens' Advice Bureaux (CAB) and Housing Benefit staff to a Panel meeting to provide examples of current working relationships and suggestions for improvements. The discussion provided an opportunity for CAB and Housing Benefit staff to clarify operational concerns and problems currently being experienced by service users within the District. Members encouraged joint working with Council Officers and CAB staff and suggested that this could be achieved through an existing housing advice forum.

2.4 Tackling Homelessness

The Panel considered the problems of homelessness currently experienced within the District and the work of the homelessness service in tackling this issue. Members commended the Officers for their work undertaken and the innovative solutions employed in attempting to address the problem. It was concluded that the problem could only be fully resolved with significant additional resources, which were not currently available.

3.0 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

3.1 Performance Indicators

The Panel continues to monitor performance indicators of the Housing Service. The Panel are happy with the performance of the Housing Service.

4.1 CALL IN – MEALS ON WHEELS IN COUNCIL - OWNED SHELTERED HOUSING

The Panel considered a call-in of a Cabinet decision concerning meals on wheels in Council-owned sheltered housing schemes. After a detailed discussion, the Panel was of the view that the decision to terminate the provision of meals to three Council-owned sheltered housing schemes was appropriate.

5.0 WORK PROGRAMME

5.1 Obesity Away Day with LRP

A meeting was held between the Housing, Health and Social Inclusion and Leisure Review Panels to review the action currently being undertaken in the District on obesity. Member's discussions produced a varied list of issues which need to be addressed and taken forward with partner agencies, these included: - better shared understanding of the issue and the available data, improved education and information for participants – as prevention (to avoid obesity) and as management (for those people already obese or overweight), more programmes of activity and improved joint working between agencies (including schools). These findings will be an important part in the creation of the next Obesity Strategy for the New Forest of which both Review Panels will input and monitor.

Meeting Venues - The Review Panel will be taking their meetings 'on the road' and holding meetings at external locations across the District. The Panel hopes that by ensuring that meetings are easily accessible within the locality, greater community involvement in the work of the Review Panel will be encouraged.

6.0 CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

As shown in this report the work of the Review Panel, in my opinion, has been quite varied but in working closely with our respective Officers, I feel that we have had an excellent year and have made good progress in scrutiny.

Cllr Mrs J L Cleary

Chairman, Housing, Health and Social Inclusion Review Panel



LEISURE

REVIEW PANEL 2005/06

1.0 MAJOR REVIEWS

1.1 **Community Support**

The Panel hosted a session to examine the level of support given to voluntary and community sector groups within the District. Representatives from external organisations within the sector attended the session and made valuable contributions to the debate. Findings from the session highlighted the need to raise awareness of current provision within the community sector and the need to strengthen communication with partner organisations. The Portfolio Holder has taken on board the Panel's recommendations for the adoption of the findings as an input to the future work of Leisure Service and its partners, in the field of community support.

1.2 **Health and Fitness Strategy**

The Panel considered performance against the key objectives of the Health and Fitness Strategy. A major conclusion was that cycling, both from an environmental and healthy lifestyle point of view, should be promoted. The absence of safe routes within the District was highlighted as a barrier to promotion of cycling and it was recommended that Hampshire County Council be lobbied to move forward the provision of safe cycling routes. Members reviewed the need to balance both social and financial factors in setting objectives. The continuation of holiday programmes in Health and Leisure centres was a matter where cost effectiveness due to under-utilisation had been considered. It was felt that these programmes had great value to users and aggressive marketing needed to take place to improve take-up of the programmes.

1.3 Leisure Provision for Young People

The Panel hosted a discussion with guests from the youth sector, including a small group of young people from the District, on the level of youth provision within the District and how adequately this meets the needs of young people. The session produced a healthy debate on the negative perceptions of young people and the need to raise awareness of 'good news' stories regarding young people's activities within the District. The conclusion was that a more planned approach was needed in communication and information provision and that the Council could do more to utilise modern technology such as text messaging in actively engaging with young people. Positive feedback was received from all attendees, in particular the young people of the group, who had found that the session provided a positive opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns. The findings of the session have been put forward to the Portfolio Holder for further consideration and action.

2.0 OTHER ITEMS WHERE AN ISSUE WAS CONSIDERED OR INFORMATION GATHERED

2.1 Obesity Away Day with Housing, Health & Social Inclusion Review Panel

A joint event was held with the Housing, Health and Social Inclusion Review Panel to review the action being undertaken in the District on obesity. In the discussion produced a variety of issues which it was felt need to be addressed and taken forward with partner agencies. These included: - Better shared understanding of the issue and the available data; improved education and information for participants – as prevention (to avoid obesity) and as management (for those people already obese or overweight); more programmes of activity; and improved joint working between agencies (including schools). These findings will be an important part in the creation of the next Obesity Strategy for the New Forest, to which both Review Panels will provide input and monitor.

3.0 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

3.1 Leisure Service Plan

The Panel's Lead Scrutiny Members continue to monitor the Leisure Services Plan and have produced progress reports for the Panel's consideration.

4.0 WORK PROGRAMME

4.1 Tour – Eling Tide Mill

Members attended a tour of Eling Tide Mill to examine the facilities currently on offer. Members found the tour useful, however noted their concerns regarding the under-utilisation of the facility as a tourist attraction. The Panel recommended that investigation take place into offering a package of facilities at Eling, including the Heritage Centre.

4.2 Tour – The New Forest Tour Bus

The New Forest Tour Bus was the focal point of the day, demonstrating the partnership working with visitor attractions. It was felt that there was need to demonstrate how the Council, together with Hampshire County Council and the emerging National Park Authority needed to finance this initiative, not only to encourage such an important attraction, but to promote cycle access, by way of the bus trailer, and reduce traffic in sensitive areas.

4.3 Workshop

The Panel held a workshop to gain better understanding of the role of Panel members in undertaking the Fundamental Service Review and to evaluate the Panel's work programme for the previous year. Various learning points were taken from the previous year's work, with suggestions for areas for improvements. Members recognised the need to revise the way in which the Panel undertakes reviews and makes assessments of outcomes. The Panel felt that to ensure that effective scrutiny takes place that Panel decisions should be revisited and monitored on a regular basis through member and officer progress reports.

5.0 CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

The work of the Panel members has been directed towards a better understanding of the maintenance and marketing issues at the Health and Leisure Centres, as well as promoting partnership working with the Forestry Commission, the National Park Access Forum and Hampshire Country Council on access issues and the development of user guides.

A recent national survey of tour buses placed NFDC in first place for customer satisfaction, and demonstrated that a major take-up by local people was helping to increase enjoyment of the Forest whilst encouraging 'car free' travel. Funding has since been approved for two tour buses, which will help the project develop over the next three years.

The Council continues to help develop sustainable tourism, working jointly with New Forest Tourism Association.

Cllr R J Neath

Chairman, Leisure Review Panel

