

Report of Review Panels for 2006/07



REPORT OF THE REVIEW PANELS FOR 2006/07

1. OVERVIEW

This year the structural changes to the operation of the Review Panels introduced in 2004/05 have continued 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 and Portfolio Holders. The Panels are continuing to concentrate on focussed reviews or information gathering with defined objectives. The use of small task and finish working groups has continued and this has proved effective in allowing in-depth studies by a small number of members for reporting back to the Panels.

There have been a number of significant items of work which have come forward from the Panels. Recent examples include the work undertaken by the Housing, Health and Social Inclusion Review Panel to examine the changes to the provision of sheltered housing and the eventual outsourcing of the central control service, the Leisure fundamental service review, the evaluation of means to reduce unnecessary fear of crime in the community, waste minimisation options and the production of a Procurement Strategy by a member/officer working group set up by COP. These will hopefully lead to improved Council services and reduced costs, as well as encouraging local businesses by making it easier to tender for the provision of goods and services.

There has been a developing degree of dialogue between the Executive and some Panels in progressing an identified task. For example the Cabinet specifically requested the Housing, Health and Social Inclusion Panel to take forward the work on the possible outsourcing of Central Control and to be actively involved in the selection of the contractor. The Environment Panel appointed representatives to the Steering Group, established by the Environment Portfolio Holder, to supervise the review of waste collection.

Each of the Panels is continuing to develop its own 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. A more detailed synopsis of the work of each Panel follows in the later chapters of this report.

2. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

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. In general terms, the Lead Scrutiny Members have continued to develop strong relationships with Service Heads and have started to develop a clear understanding of the constraints that apply to service operation. Some Lead Scrutiny Members have found it harder than others to develop a role, however, in particular in the Crime and Disorder area of work, where much of the activity is carried out in partnership with other organisations. The Lead Scrutiny Members did not feel the need to bring forward any issues of concern to the Panels during the year.

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.

3. EXPENDITURE PLANS

This year the Panels have continued to try to establish a clear role in the expenditure plan process. The Panels receive draft expenditure plan proposals in November, for comment to the Cabinet. In addition, the Lead Scrutiny Members may have been involved in background discussions leading up to this stage. However, the Panels as a whole still find it difficult to see a clear role for themselves in this process, with their perception remaining that the expenditure plan proposals are too well developed, by the time their views are sought, to be subject to much influence. There is also a view that they are at a disadvantage in not having background information presented to them, including proposals that have been considered, and excluded, at an earlier stage. As a consequence very few suggestions are made about the proposals that do come to the Panels. However it remains open to all Panels to consider expenditure issues at any stage during the year. Reviews carried out by the Panels often have cost implications that feed into the expenditure plan process.

4. CALL INS

There has only been one call-in during the current year, continuing the trend of little or no activity of this kind. In general terms, more contentious decisions continue to be 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.

5. FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS FOR SCRUTINY

It was mentioned last year that, apart from this annual report, there was 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. Unfortunately this remains the case. During the coming year, 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 2006/07

1. MAJOR REVIEWS

1.1 Accredited Community Safety Officers and Police Community Support Officers

This area of work has proved to be one of the key focuses for the Panel over the last year. This Council has paid for a proportion of the cost of four additional Accredited Community Safety Officers (ACSOs) to supplement the teams put in place by the County Council. Together with the Crime and Disorder Portfolio Holder, the Panel has continued to monitor the effectiveness of the service and to seek to establish whether the Council is getting value for money. A number of potential areas for improvement were identified, and subsequently pursued by the Portfolio Holder. As a result, proper performance indicators will be developed, the way in which the ACSOs are briefed has been changed to reduce travelling time to their beats, and the Council has pursued its concerns about the disproportionate effect that long term sickness in the ACSO team was having on the additional service being paid for by the Council. The CCTV and Licensing Manger is now attending the Tasking and Coordination Group that decides where the ACSOs should be deployed.

The Panel expressed a strong view that there should be a more rigorous service level agreement in place before any further ACSOs were paid for by this Council.

The Panel have continued to take a pro-active approach to monitoring the effectiveness of this service and several Councillors have accompanied the ACSOs in their duties. In each case, the Councillors have been very impressed by the individual officers they have observed and were satisfied that they could play a valuable role in addressing low level crime and nuisance behaviour in local communities.

Panel members receive regular updates on the activities of the ACSOs, and as a result expressed some misgivings that full use was not being made of the powers to issue fixed penalty notices.

The service being offered by the County Council's ACSOs now has to fit into a more complex framework with the introduction of the Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's). Again, the Panel have taken a proactive approach to finding out about their role in other communities, where they are already well established, and will be maintaining a watching brief to see how the ACSO and PCSO services will interact in this District and whether the tasking mechanisms ensure that there is a synergy of activity, and not duplication. This will continue to be a very active area of work over the coming year as the Panel seek to establish where the Council's resources should be directed to achieve best effect for the people of the Forest.

1.2 CCTV System

The Panel has continued to seek statistical and other measures to establish whether the CCTV system is effective in preventing crime and combating the fear of crime.

Extensive research has established that, nationally, the effects of CCTV systems on crime reduction cannot be demonstrated in statistical terms, and this is reflected locally. It is also difficult to develop measurements that would allow the cost effectiveness of CCTV to be compared with, for example, the ACSO service. However, each member and stakeholder receives a monthly report on CCTV activities. As a result, tangible outcomes are reported, but resulting benefits are difficult to quantify. A narrative is also included regarding noteworthy incidents, including providing evidence in cases and locating missing persons etc.

The Panel maintain a strong view that the communities that benefit directly from CCTV coverage should meet a greater proportion of the direct costs. They have put forward recommendations to encourage greater efforts to be made to secure greater contributions from the local councils and chambers of trade, in recognition of the direct benefits that they enjoy. While the police remain the greatest direct beneficiary of the CCTV system, nationally and locally they do not contribute towards the cost.

Following extensive research and detailed debates, the Panel expressed the view that the CCTV system should continue to be operated and, to make best use of the investment in the Control Room and other equipment, the same level of direct manning should continue. This view has subsequently been supported by the Portfolio Holder and the Leader of the Council.

1.3 Fear of Crime

The Panel established a task and finish working group to look at ways of combating the fear of crime in the community. To assist, they undertook some detailed research, including through the Citizen's Panel, to establish local perceptions and factors that influenced those perceptions. With the assistance of Bournemouth University, great care was taken over the wording of the questionnaire, to ensure that it did not, itself, increase fearful perceptions.

The working group went on to make detailed recommendations, which will in due course be put before the Cabinet. These recommendations include the concept of taking some meetings of the Panel out into the community, to engage with public aspirations and provide a forum for reassurance. As it is expected that the Police and Justice Act will require such community engagement, the Panel considered it would be opportune to at least start developing ideas about how to do this most effectively.

The Panel have confirmed from their research that the Forest remains a safe place to live.

2. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

2.1 Service Performance 2005/06

Service performance did not cause any concerns to the Panel with none of the indicators showing red under the traffic lights system.

As in previous years, the ability of the Lead Scrutiny Members to develop their role was limited by the relevant functions being carried out largely in partnership with other organisations, over which we have no direct operational control.

2.2 Domestic Violence

The Panel reviewed the Council's performance against BVPI 225, which was a cumulative measure, in 11 parts. Where this Council is directly responsible for action, good progress is being made. This is on activities such as the production of a directory of local services that can help the victims of abuse. In respect of the requirement to provide 1 refuge place per 10,000 population, the Panel concurred with the County Council's view that, because of the characteristics of the Forest, there was no demand for additional refuge places here. Members concluded that the Council was doing the important actions that would make a difference locally. Performance will be measured again in September 2007.

3. TOPICS WHERE INFORMATION WAS GATHERED

Partnership Provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

Police and Justice Action – Implications for the future operation of the Crime and Disorder Review Panel

Local Public Services Agreement 2

Antisocial Behaviour Orders and their effectiveness

Road Safety and the use of Speed Indicator Devices

Safer Neighbourhoods and the Neighbourhood Policing Teams

4. OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN'S COMMENTS

Whilst the ACSOs individually provide positive interaction in the community, the New Forest District Council still has not got a value for money service from HCC with many of the concerns still not fully addressed. Whilst officers are working to have a greater control over the tasking of the ACSOs the fundamental issues as identified in the report still exist and until a new agreement on the service provided by the ACSOs formulated by NFDC officers with HCC can be arranged we will not get the most effective use of the service.

PCSOs should be evaluated in a structured manner and if identified to be an effective tool in the strategy to reduce antisocial behaviour an Officer/Member proposal be formulated to look at the potential benefits for NFDC to fund either PCSOs or ACSOs or a combination of both.

Whilst the existing CCTV system should be maintained no activity has been progressed into expanding it into the other main communities in the District, Hythe, New Milton, and Fordingbridge. The New Forest District Council should look to pursue the installation of CCTV in the towns that do not have NFDC cameras but are contributing towards those that do through the rates. A balance of actions to reduce criminal and anti-social behaviour across the District of which this is a part should be proposed and actioned to help improve the quality of life of the District's residents.

The Fear of Crime working party having identified the New Forest as one of the safest areas to live in should pursue the strategy of enlightening the people of the New Forest to that fact and further engaging with the local press to help produce local good news stories.

As for the future, the Panel will need to be reorganised in line with the requirements of the Crime and Justice Act, which includes more meetings located within the community along with active public participation and greater responsibility by the NFDC to produce actions on individual Crime & Disorder issues.

Cllr M Wade

Lead Member for Crime & Disorder

5. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

This year's major reviews by the Panel have highlighted a number of concerns with regard to value for money.

There is a strong desire to achieve a best value operation from the ACSOs, funded by NFDC, which is proving to be difficult. The introduction of PCSOs and more targeted Neighbourhood Policing this April has called into question whether the current arrangements are the best way forward. However until the Police Safer Neighbourhood strategy has settled in one cannot introduce what could be a step change in existing arrangements. The incoming Crime and Disorder Panel will need to consider carefully any changes being made taking particular account of the way Police PCSO funding may alter when Government funding disappears in future years.

There is no doubt that our CCTV coverage needs to be maintained despite the fact that research does not give a statistically significant improvement in Crime reduction. The perceived value by the public especially where life threatening events are involved cannot be over valued. It has become evident that there is a need to extend NFDCs CCTV coverage to other towns in the District particularly those with a larger population density. This is a second area for the new panel/officers to consider perhaps with the addition of a mobile CCTV camera to target specific locations. It is probably not practical to consider any Dummy Cameras in the light of the legal case that occurred for a North of England Council. This is an area where funding becomes a large concern and a detailed investigation of the possibility of shared costs with the appropriate town councils and local business communities is essential.

Combining the results of the successful Fear of Crime Panel work and with regard to the new Police and Justice Act the need to go out into the Community has been established. With this in mind the incoming panel and the officers will need to quickly establish the right procedural arrangements for an 'in the field' Crime and Disorder Panel type meeting. This would likely require other partner organisation representatives, particularly the Police, and possibly a sub set of the Crime and Disorder Panel members rather than the whole panel attending on each occasion. It is suggested that a pilot scheme be established by the new panel and to aim for the first meeting of this type to be held in September 2007. These meetings may well be additional to the existing Crime and Disorder Panel meetings but that of course must be discussed by the new panel.

Finally I would like to thank both the Panel and the officers for all their hard work over the past year. Especial thanks must go to the officers for their dedicated efforts in translating new government legislation into an intelligible form and also their comprehensive work on Emergency Planning.

Cllr John Penwarden

Chairman Crime and Disorder Review Panel



CORPORATE OVERVIEW PANEL (COP) – 2006/07

1. MAJOR REVIEWS

1.1 Procurement Strategy for 2007-2011

Building on the substantial work undertaken in 2005/06, Panel members have carried through their work on Procurement, culminating in the production of a Procurement Strategy for 2007-2011, which was approved by the Cabinet in January 2007.

The aim of this strategy was to provide a strategic framework that would ensure the Council maximised the opportunities that could be derived from effective and innovative procurement of goods and services. This would in turn promote an approach to procurement that would improve service delivery, realise savings and achieve benefits from working in partnership.

Detailed action plans will be developed to assist with the delivery of the Strategy and provide a focus for action. The Council will be working with the Regional Centre of Procurement Excellence to take advantage of regional collaborative opportunities and, in addition, is committed to actively engaging small businesses in order to increase the amount of work, goods and services awarded locally.

The Task and Finish Group for this project comprised Cllrs Baker, Neath, Treleaven and Ward, who worked with officers to produce what the Cabinet described as an excellent new procurement strategy.

2. OTHER ISSUES CONSIDERED

2.1 ICT Issues

A number of significant ICT-related reports have been brought to the Panel in 2006/07:-

- **ICT Security Policy and Guidance for Members**

A member/officer working group has looked at a revised ICT Security Policy for members. Cllrs Mrs Robinson, Shand, Ward and Wise helped revise the policy statement and make it clearer. The document was further revised to take account of amendments to tax legislation and additional refinements were made for clarity. The amended policy and guidance was subsequently adopted by the Cabinet and Council.
- **Draft ICT Strategy 2006-2011**

The Panel has considered the draft ICT Strategy for 2006-2011 which outlined:-

 - The future business agenda for NFDC
 - External and internal business drivers
 - Past, present and future direction
 - A reshaping of ICT services
 - Managing the process of change
 - Updating existing ICT policies
 - The implementation plan
- **Disruption to the Council's E-mail System – 20 to 28 February 2007**

At the Chairman's request, the Panel received a detailed analysis of the causes of the recent disruption to the Council's e-mail system. It concluded that the problem arose from a rare combination of events. A number of learning points have been identified and changes to the infrastructure and recovery plans will be implemented.
- **Members' ICT Provision**

The Panel has made recommendations to the Finance and Efficiency Portfolio Holder on possible changes to the provision of ICT equipment to councillors, and on the introduction of an allowance to members not using ICT provision provided by the Council. The proposals will provide flexibility for users and achieve savings.

2.2 Expenditure Plans 2007/08 to 2010/11

Another recurring theme in the Panel's work has been the question of how this Panel and other Panels can enhance their input into the budget process. There is a common acceptance that the current reporting system and report format could be improved so as to increase the depth of financial scrutiny, given the complexities of the budget. Whilst it is acknowledged that it is for Lead Scrutiny Members to continue to engage more fully in the budget process, COP has recently agreed to set up a working group to review the format of budget reports. This group will meet early in the new municipal year and will look at, among other things, the presentation of the data, for example the possibility of providing more graphs and charts to better illustrate trends, and make the issues more accessible.

2.3 Performance Management

The Panel has continued with its role in monitoring the overall performance of the Council. The two main reports considered during the year were:-

- (i) The Performance Plan 2006/07, in consideration of which, the Panel requested that in future, separate, more detailed reports should be made if any Policy and

Resources performance indicators were highlighted in “red”, so that these could be properly scrutinised.

(ii) Key Achievements 2006/07 and Key Targets 2007/08

2.4 Rural Assistance Grants

Following work undertaken on this issue in 2005/06, the Panel has considered two further reports on the topic.

In reviewing various options for the future operation of the scheme, the Panel focused on the option to make these grants available to all members, taking account members whose wards covered several parishes, and alternative schemes based on different budget options.

The Panel then considered the issue further and recommended to Cabinet that the scheme be extended to all members, preferably retaining the sum of £500, but leaving this for Cabinet bearing in mind budget constraints.

2.5 Vehicle and Fleet Management

The Panel requested and received a comprehensive report on the Council's vehicle fleet, the maintenance arrangements and the replacement programme. The scope of the report covered the municipal fleet (yellow vehicles) officers' leased cars and business journeys undertaken by employees in their own vehicles. The Panel was pleased to note that the Council had a well established process for the acquisition and maintenance of the municipal vehicle fleet.

An environmental impact assessment of all business vehicle usage across the Council is currently underway and will be fed into the Green Audit being undertaken this year, which is to be reported both to the Environment Review Panel and this Panel in its corporate capacity.

3. CALL-IN

The Panel dealt with the call-in of a Cabinet decision to appoint an officer to serve on the Totton College Board of Governors. The Panel accepted the original Cabinet decision.

4. WORK PROGRAMME

Following the May elections, the Panel will be undertaking a review of its Work Programme for the ensuing year and beyond. The following projects are planned or on-going:-

- Scrutiny of Joint Working/Collaborating with other Agencies
- Assistance to Parish Councils
- Corporate Communications Unit and Strategy
- Green Audit
- Review of Budget Report Formats

5. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

This year has continued to see a greater reliance on the Lead Scrutiny Members undertaking 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, and I should like to see this taken forward over the next 4 years of the new Council. Without such routine work being undertaken outside the full Panel

meetings, those meetings would become unwieldy and the Panel would have little opportunity to do any significant or detailed scrutiny.

Details of aspects of the Panel's work is shown in the report above, and I thank all the officers who have contributed to the work of the Panel, including Andy Rogers, the Committee Administrator.

Cllr J G Ward,

Chairman Corporate Overview Panel



ECONOMY AND PLANNING

REVIEW PANEL - 2006/07

1. MAJOR REVIEWS

1.1 Car Parking Standards Review

Continuing the work started in 2005/06, the Panel has considered possible changes to car parking standards and their application.

Specifically this work relates to parking limits and standards for both residential and non-residential development. The main issues identified by the Panel were:-

- Standards in areas where there were no public transport alternatives to cars (during the day or just during the evening)
- Car ownership/dependants in working families and pensioner households
- Whether NFDC was out of step with practice elsewhere
- Should a minimum standard be re-introduced in town centres with parking problems?
- Should there be a minimum standard of two car spaces for all dwellings with one, two or three bedrooms?

The overall aims of the review were:-

- To provide information which would enable the Council to avoid making existing parking problems worse
- To support the local economy, particularly town centres and tourism
- To gain public acceptance of Government guidance
- To recognise local circumstances

The review was undertaken following an outline scoping plan prepared by Cllrs Treleven and F R Harrison using a scoping form which the Panel was first to use.

A number of useful issues came out of the review. The Panel

- Suggested that a Supplementary Planning Document in relation to parking standard which applies the maximum flexibility be allowed following publication of the PPS3 Guidance
- Requested that the Planning Development Control Committee and Planning officers be reminded of existing policies to allow environmental reasons as well as highway reasons to form objections to certain schemes involving reduced car parking.
- Suggested that the maximum parking permitted for one bedroom dwellings should be increased (say from 1 to 1.5 spaces) when the parking standards were revised.
- Proposed that details of the County Council's prescribed minimum dimensions for garages be brought to their next meeting together with observations on their appropriateness and adequacy
- Asked that the Panel be given the opportunity to review the policy in the light of experience following the Council's review of off and on-street parking management

All of the above showed how a properly scoped review could bring useful results which would in turn lead to further avenues of investigation for the Panel, some of which are mentioned later in this report.

It was concluded that the changes to policies and standards for car parking over the last twelve years formed part of a broad and long term strategy issued by successive national governments and taken up also by the regional authorities. There had been a number of unwanted effects at local level. It was uncertain how far these were a direct result of the policy changes which have come over an extended period and how far the product of rising car ownership and use, which affected established suburbs as well as newly developed areas, remains a matter of debate. The Panel has noted however that a number of aspects of the policy regime within the District need to be re-examined with a view to minimising these side effects.

2. OTHER ITEMS CONSIDERED

2.1 Design and Residential Layout to Prevent Inappropriate Car Parking

A member/officer working group involving Cllrs Parkes, F R Harrison, Hale and Mrs Holding, together with officers has met over a period of months to address issues relating to concerns about prevention of parking in unauthorised and inappropriate places in residential areas. The result of this work was encapsulated in a design guide entitled "Housing Design, Density and Character". The document gives examples of possible solutions. A Supplementary Planning Document is now a material consideration when planning applications are assessed.

2.2 Employment Development Plan

The Panel has considered an employment development plan document, which sets out the Council's preferred strategy for meeting the needs of business and providing for economic development and employment in the District over the next 15 years, in the context of the Council's Economic Strategy and the Local Plan.

Mr Barry Olorenshaw, Chairman of the New Forest Business Partnership, was invited to attend and express views on the Plan. The Panel's comments were passed on to the Cabinet.

2.3 Traffic Management Strategy

The Panel has considered and advised the Cabinet on a proposed Traffic Management Strategy for the District. The aims of the Strategy cover such issues as (among other things) road safety, contributing towards prosperity of towns and villages in the District, minimising congestion, encouraging use of public transport where available, environmental improvements, and setting and reviewing compatible on and off street parking charges.

2.4 Economic Development Strategy

The Panel considered a proposed Economic Development Strategy.

The work incorporated a study by Roger Tym and Partners, consultants, and Lead Scrutiny Members previewed the Strategy document and advised on its content.

The Panel agreed with the Cabinet request for a more concise and focussed document, as it was felt that a shorter document would be more accessible to the public. The emphasis was also on measurable and deliverable objectives for the Council to achieve.

2.5 Economic Development Service Plan

The Panel has considered and recommended for approval an Economic Development Service Plan based around the findings of the Economic Development Strategy, and drawn up in consultation with the two Lead Scrutiny Members for the service, Councillors Treleven and Dart.

It is intended to invite representatives from the New Forest Business Partnership to address Panel Members about matters of mutual interest.

It has also been agreed that the Panel (with all other Members of the Council invited) make visits to key business locations in the district.

2.6 Local Development Framework and Core Strategy

The Panel has been working with the New Forest National Park Authority to prepare a joint Core Strategy Development Plan document for the whole of the New Forest District and the New Forest National Park combined. A joint consultation exercise on the review of the Local Strategic Partnership's Community Strategy, the New Forest National Park Management Plan, and the Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy were undertaken at the end of last year.

Summaries of the results of the consultation relating to 'Housing', 'Economy', 'Towns', 'Villages' and 'Countryside – Spatial Planning Issues' were included in the report. The Panel also considered a summary of the results of the consultation on the employment DPD Preferred Options document.

The Panel has monitored progress with the LDF Core Strategy, noting the work of the Joint Members Advisory Panel, which comprised Members from the District Council, the National Park Authority, and the LSP.

2.7 Southampton Laser Gateway

The Panel considered details of a proposal for the installation of a laser gateway emanating from Southampton Civic Centre clock tower, and considered a response to the proposal for recommendation to the Economy and Planning Portfolio Holder. The Panel recommended that a letter objection to the scheme be sent to Southampton City council, based mainly on a number of environmental and legal concerns.

2.8 Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing – Presentations and Discussion of Implications / Local Development Framework (LDF) and Joint Core Strategy

The Panel has had a joint meeting with Planning Development Control Committee on the implications of the recently published Planning Policy Statement 3, and an update on the LDF and Joint Core strategy. Members received various presentations relating to:-

- Affordable Housing
- Housing Density and Character
- Parking Issues
- Housing Land Supply
- Local Development Framework
- Joint Core Strategy Work for the New Forest and National Park
- Key Issues for the Core Strategy

3. OTHER TOPICS COVERED

Other notable issues the Panel has dealt with this year include:-

- County Council's Hampshire Action Teams (Hats)
- Key Achievements and targets
- Expenditure Plans
- Street Lighting
- Supplementary Planning Document on Design of Waste Management Facilities in the New Forest

4. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Despite the Panel's intention to concentrate on fewer subjects, in greater depth throughout the year; external pressures largely determined their scope and contributed towards an excessive number of agenda items.

It is hoped that, with a period of lesser change and a fuller understanding of the impact of the creation of the New Forest National Park Authority, a newly formed Review Panel, under a new Council, will sharpen its direction and focus.

By chance, the first meeting under the new Council will be just such an opportunity to cement the notion of a single subject, already in the work programme, to be investigated in considerable detail.

Cllr K F Ault

Chairman, Economy and Planning Review Panel



ENVIRONMENT

REVIEW PANEL 2006/07

1. MAJOR REVIEWS

1.1 Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAS)

Last year it was reported that the Panel was keeping air quality under review and in particular monitoring the operation of the 3 AQMAS that had been declared. This work has continued throughout 2006/07. There has been good progress in all 3 AQMAS. In Totton and Lyndhurst, where traffic is the main source of pollutant, air quality monitoring has continued, and there has been considerable work with the County Council to bring forward solutions. At Fawley, the main source of sulphur dioxide had been identified, and the refinery had been given direct access to the real time monitor to allow them to judge when an exceedance was likely and to adjust their operating procedures. This had proved very successful.

1.2 Waste Management Facilities in New Developments

The Panel had previously recommended to Cabinet that they should bring forward, as a matter of urgency, supplementary planning guidance which ensured that adequate provision was made for the separation and storage of waste and recyclable materials in any new developments. The Panel were delighted to comment on the draft supplementary planning guidance prior to its publication for public consultation and its subsequent adoption. They have also commended this course of action to the National Park Authority, as the planning authority for the National Park area.

1.3 Contaminated Land

The Council has various obligations with respect to contaminated land, imposed by the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The Council have undertaken a paper based exercise which found 1,000 potentially contaminated sites which have then been assigned high, low and medium risk status to guide the urgency of them being inspected directly. So far, about one third of all identified sites have been directly

inspected, all coming from the highest risk category. As a result, 6 sites have been identified which require further, more detailed, evaluation. In the meantime, it has come to light that there was extensive pollution of the foreshore at Eling. It was inevitable that such problem sites would come forward on an ad-hoc basis. DEFRA was offering 100% grants to allow the proper investigation of problem sites and to allow a proper plan to be prepared for any remedial works that were necessary. The Panel recommended the Cabinet to apply for a grant to make as much progress in this area as possible, within the staffing resource available to undertake the work. They also suggested that the officers should be authorised to commission such work, without further member authority, provided it was within certain criteria. The Cabinet subsequently supported this approach.

1.4 Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act

This Act brought forward a number of enforcement powers to help address a range of problem behaviours such as littering, graffiti and abandoning shopping trolleys. Together with the Crime and Disorder, Economy and Planning and Health and Social Inclusion Review Panels, members discussed the first tranche of enforcement powers that should be adopted. The Panels made detailed recommendations to the Cabinet, that were subsequently adopted, for the powers to be implemented immediately, the powers that should be delegated to officers, and also the level of fines, fixed penalty notices and discounts for early payment that should apply. Members have supported an evolutionary approach to the introduction of the new powers. This will include the involvement, in due course, of Town and Parish Councils, who can play a valuable role in a number of areas.

It was decided to undertake further consultations with Town and Parish Councils on the powers available in respect of dogs as there are complications with the existing bylaws and other control orders, and it is also important to take a consistent approach across the District. This issue will come back to the Panel in due course.

The other issue that was considered separately was the potential adoption of powers that this Act introduced under Schedule 4 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, with respect to abandoned shopping trolleys. While this is not an issue in the District as a whole there are certain problem areas, such as in Ringwood. Cllr D Harrison put forward a motion to Council commending the adoption of these powers. The Panel have now debated the issues involved and have recommended that the Cabinet initiate the necessary public consultations that must be carried out if the Council is to decide to adopt these powers.

1.5 Waste and Recycling Options

This research had been commissioned by a Steering Group that had been set up by the Environment Portfolio Holder, including representatives of the Panel. The Panel considered the outcome of the research in the light of the need to increase recycling performance, but also to respect the views of local residents, as expressed in a questionnaire that had been circulated to establish opinions about the current and potential waste collection methods, and also the relative merits of weekly as opposed to fortnightly collections.

While the trend nationally was towards the introduction of wheelie bins and fortnightly collections, this option did not find favour with local residents and the Panel concluded that there was a sound rationale for questioning whether such a system would be the correct solution for a special area such as the Forest. In addition, recycling activity in other areas often increased the tonnages collected, which was environmentally counter-productive. The Panel preferred options that promoted waste minimisation.

The Panel made a number of detailed recommendations to the Cabinet, that were subsequently adopted, which commended a more cautionary approach and sought to

improve recycling performance using the existing system.

The Panel also subsequently reconvened the Refuse Collection and Recycling Working Party and requested them to examine, specifically, measures to promote waste minimisation. The Working Party has brought forward a number of recommendations that the Panel supported. These include lobbying Project Integra, and through them other bodies, including Government, on a number of issues, such as recycling performance being judged solely on tonnages, which is a disincentive to reusing plastics; and also seeking properly based trials, with measurable outputs, on the effects of kerbside glass collections and also the use of green cones for disposing of kitchen waste. The Panel is seeking to hold the green cone trial in the New Forest District.

1.6 Review of Grounds Maintenance.

The Panel looked at the frequency of grass cutting along highway verges and concluded that there was merit in increasing the frequency. By reducing the wear and tear on machinery, the net cost would be in the region of £15,000. The Cabinet was recommended to include an additional expenditure plan bid, but this was deleted in the subsequent expenditure plan process.

1.7 Undertaking a Green Audit of New Forest District Council

The Panel had been considering the concept of undertaking a green audit, starting initially with the effects of the Council's vehicle fleet on air quality issues, when Cllr Shepherd put forward a Motion to Council commending a more widespread review. The Panel discussed options for undertaking the review, bearing in mind that the Council was an organisation of significant size and could make a contribution through reducing its carbon footprint and energy usage. The Panel made a number of recommendations to the Cabinet which, with minor amendment, were adopted. The Green Audit has therefore commenced and will be a major topic for consideration in the coming year.

1.8 Street Cleansing

The Panel have just initiated a review, based on Prince 2 principles, of the street cleansing function. The service enjoys a high and increasing customer satisfaction rating, but it is nonetheless opportune to see if the way the service operates can achieve greater operational efficiencies, and also be smarter, for example by greater integration with other services such as grass cutting.

2. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

2.1 Service Performance – 2005/06

The Panel reviewed performance against a number of performance indicators for the refuse collection, recycling and street cleansing areas of activity. Performance against indicator BS86 for the net cost per household was showing in the red category and members requested further information on this, bearing in mind that New Forest was the third cheapest waste collection authority in Hampshire

2.2 Food Safety Service Plan

The Panel review, on an annual basis, the Food Safety Service Plan. The previous year, there had been difficulty in recruiting and retaining suitably qualified officers and the problems that this was causing in delivering the service. Some of the training initiatives that have been put in place are now bearing fruit and the current establishment was sufficient to meet the requirement of the Food Safety Service Plan. Neighbouring authorities continue to advertise posts at a higher salary, which remains of concern.

2.3 Lead Scrutiny Member Role and Reports

The Lead Scrutiny Members have continued to develop their relationships with the services that they are monitoring. In particular, Cllrs Dow and Penwarden played an active part in the various seminars that were organised under the Safer Food, Better Business programme.

All the Lead Scrutiny Members brought forward positive reports in respect of their service areas, and did not raise any issues of concern.

3. OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN'S COMMENTS

I am pleased the Panel has focused on issues that will help to identify real environmental benefits to a large number of services. This will help in our efforts to spread the word to the whole of the New Forest

Cllr Steve Sheppard

Lead Member for Environment

4. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

As can be seen from the above report the Panel has undertaken 8 major reviews this year and my thanks must go to the entire Panel for their hard work. In addition the Panel has monitored performance and all key targets were achieved. Of course none of this would have been possible if it had not been for the entire team of dedicated officers and we are indeed lucky in this authority to have such excellent assistance. There is still hard work to be done in the coming year and I mention the two particular topics at 1.5 – Waste and Recycling options and at 1.7 - Undertaking a Green Audit of the New Forest Council, both of which represent challenges to the Panel.

Cllr Paul Woods

Chairman Environment Review Panel



HOUSING, HEALTH AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

REVIEW PANEL 2006/07

1. MAJOR REVIEWS

1.1 Sheltered Housing

The Panel has been regularly reviewing the progress made on the Sheltered Housing Review. As part of the review, investigation of issues was undertaken by a working party comprising tenants, members of the Review Panel and officers. The working party met on several occasions and considered ways forward in continuing to provide a quality Sheltered Housing service.

Members were mindful of the needs of service users, however they recognised that in order to respond effectively to the changes of residents' housing needs and budget constraints, some decommissioning of services was required. Following recommendations from the Review Panel, the Cabinet decided to agree changes to the Sheltered Housing service. Recommendations adopted included the removal of sheltered housing accommodation status on certain schemes and changes to the standby out of hours service.

1.2 Future of Central Control

The Panel has been regularly monitoring the review into the future delivery of the Council's out of hours service, and assessed its findings in winter 2006. Following several debates and discussions held at both the Review Panel and the Cabinet, it was agreed that the Central Control service be outsourced. The Review Panel were asked by the Cabinet to take the lead in assessing the tenders from local control centre operators to provide the monitoring service. In response, the Panel established a small working party comprising officers, members and tenants' Representatives to oversee the process.

Members and tenants' representatives were happy with the decision made by the working party and company selected; nonetheless, they were mindful of the concerns of users and therefore decided that regular monitoring of the service was needed in

the early stages of its operation. Following recommendations from the Review Panel, the Cabinet agreed to the outsourcing of the Central Control service to the company recommended by the working party.

1.3 Maternity Services Review

The Review Panel held a special meeting in summer 2006 to discuss the Council's response to the Southampton University Hospital Trust (SUHT) Maternity Services Review consultation. The Review Panel sought the views of persons who were affected by the review and invited groups representative of these people to come along to the meeting and speak to the Panel. The meeting generated some public interest, and good debate was held about how the proposals would affect local mothers-to-be.

The Panel, in rigorously scrutinising the proposals within the Review, invited representatives from the SUHT to a further Panel meeting, at which they discussed the outcomes of the consultation document and the impact key decisions would have on local residents.

In assessing the birthing unit facilities available in the New Forest, and the impact closure would have on the public at large, the Chairman of the Panel and one of the Panel's opposition members visited at the birthing units in Hythe and Lymington.

The robust debates held at the Panel meetings helped to fully inform the response to the consultation by the Cabinet, who were in agreement with the findings of the Panel.

2. OTHER ITEMS WHERE AN ISSUE WAS CONSIDERED OR INFORMATION GATHERED

2.1 Panel presentations

In attempting to carry out robust scrutiny of its work programme items, the Panel decided to invite expert witnesses to Panel meetings to help better inform members of the items under consideration. This has been largely successful, and the presentations have generated good debate.

2.11 Maternity Services

As part of its role in responding to the SUHT consultation on Maternity Services, the Panel decided to invite representatives of the SUHT to two of the Panel's meetings. The SUHT were asked to present the consultation and the outcome of the consultation, and how the SUHT would manage the effect of change on local residents in the Forest. With information provided by the SUHT, and after obtaining the views of local service users, the Panel were able to respond fully to the debate and made significant contribution in the consultation process.

2.12 Supporting People

The Review Panel invited an expert in the Supporting People Programme to present on the Supporting People regime being delivered in Hampshire. Members gained an insight into the remit and work of the programme and were able to input into the consultation that was taking place in shaping future services. The Review Panel will revisit this subject soon.

2.13 Mental Health Services in the New Forest

In helping to gain a better understanding of mental health, the Panel invited two experts in mental health to present on services available to children, adolescents and adults in the New Forest. The discussion highlighted the range of problems faced by some residents and the help available to them. The

discussion did highlight that there were few specialised service units in the District and monitoring needed to take place to ensure that the needs of residents were being met. The Panel will review this subject soon. The Panel also hopes to obtain information regarding mental health services for older people.

2.2 Tenants' Representatives Presentation to the Panel

The Review Panel regularly engages with Tenants through various working groups and debates with Tenants' Representatives at Panel meetings. This allows Tenants the opportunity to input into reviews and decisions of the Council. In order to gauge whether this engagement process was working, the Panel invited Tenants' Representatives on the Panel to present on current issues facing Council Tenants and the Panel's engagement process.

Tenants indicated in their presentation that they were generally happy with the level of consultation and felt that they were able to contribute in the decision making process.

3. 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. PANEL MEETINGS

4.1 Venues

The Review Panel took two of their meetings 'on the road' by holding meetings at venues in Ringwood and Dibden. The Panel hoped that by making the meetings accessible to the public, there would be greater community involvement in the work of the Review Panel. This has worked to some extent, with some members of the public attending. However, despite promoting the venues of both meetings, there was only a slight increase in the number of public attendees.

The Review Panel will continue to hold some of its meetings in venues across the Forest, in the hope that public attendance will increase.

5. OPPOSITION LEAD MEMBER'S COMMENTS

The Review Panel has tried to engage the public in its work scrutinising decisions made by the Cabinet and the wider health authorities.

People are very concerned by changes in health provision locally, particularly changes to maternity services, the running down of community hospital beds in some areas, and the deterioration of community services such as district nursing and domiciliary physiotherapy. The concerns about the Out of Hours services have diminished, although the North West of the District appears to have some problems with ambulance times.

However, the public do not see the Review Panel as a place where they can air these concerns, despite the Panel's attempts to reach out into the community. This is something which should be addressed during the next Council.

The presentations from outside bodies have been useful, informative and have generated good debate.

There is scope for more consultation with other review bodies such as leisure services, and the new LINKs forums which will replace the PPIF (Patients Forums).

Cllr Dr Miranda Whitehead,
Lead Member for Health

6. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

I am very pleased with the work the Panel has undertaken this year. We have been able to establish small working groups who have been very 'hands on' in their approach and have made some key decisions. The Review Panel's work is not finished on these subjects as we fully intend to keep monitoring the changes that have been made.

We have taken our Panel 'on the road' and we had hoped for more public participation. We are doing the same again this summer; we have been the only Review Panel to do this.

When outside bodies come and give us presentations they help us to make more informed decisions, at our last meeting we had one from our tenants and we are going to be taking their ideas forward into our work programme for the forth coming year.

Cllr Mrs J L Cleary

Chairman, Housing, Health and Social Inclusion Review Panel

A black and white photograph of two people riding bicycles on a dirt path. They are seen from behind, moving away from the camera. The person on the left has a backpack. The background shows rolling hills and a clear sky. On the left side of the image, there is a dark, rectangular structure, possibly a signpost or a building corner.

LEISURE

REVIEW PANEL 2006/07

1. MAJOR REVIEWS

1.1 Fundamental Service Review

The Panel has been regularly monitoring the progress of the Leisure Services Fundamental Service Review. The Panel nominated four members, from both political groups, to contribute in the review meetings and has been supportive of the approach in undertaking the review. The Panel endorsed the draft plan and will consider the final stages of the procurement element in September.

1.2 Sun Bed Provision in Health and Leisure Centres

Following a request made by the opposition spokesman, the Review Panel carried out a review into sun bed provision in Health and Leisure Centres. Members examined the health risks attached to sun bed usage and maintenance of individuals' freedom of choice. The Panel recommended that the Portfolio Holder retain the sun beds. Members on the whole agreed that there were some risks attached to sun bed usage and that officers should review the adequacy of the current information and advice given to users.

2. OTHER ITEMS WHERE AN ISSUE WAS CONSIDERED OR INFORMATION GATHERED

2.1 Review of ICT in Leisure Services

The Panel examined whether Leisure Services was making the best use of ICT. The Panel considered the current systems in place, in particular in the Health and Leisure Centres, and considered that some systems were out of date and inefficient. The Panel recommended that financial implications of upgrading ICT within the service be considered and this was taken forward during the expenditure planning process. Following recommendations from the Review Panel, the Service Plan contains an ICT

work schedule for the first time, for which Cabinet agreed funding via the ICT Work Programme.

2.2 Grant Aid Fund

The Panel reviewed the role and funding of the grant aid scheme in Leisure Services. They determined that the funding was an effective way of engaging with the local community and raised a positive profile of the District Council. The Panel recommended to the Portfolio Holder that the status quo of this funding stream be maintained. The Portfolio Holder agreed this recommendation.

2.3 Review of Findings

The Panel reviewed the previous findings of the Review Panel and assessed whether the results of the Panel's work were being used to best advantage. In reviewing the past practice of the Panel, they considered that the operation of the Panel was largely successful. However, they decided that in future close consideration should be given to the method of recording actions and how actions are progressed at all Review Panel meetings. A four yearly review of the work of the Panel was agreed as appropriate. The Review Panel recommended that the Corporate Overview Panel consider this issue further.

2.4 Volunteering

The Panel reviewed how volunteering in the leisure sector might be encouraged. The Lead member on this item brought forward a number of recommendations to the Director of Community Services. The Panel considered that whilst the relationships between the Leisure Service and voluntary agencies were good, there was scope for improvement around publicity, training and web links.

3. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

3.1 Leisure Service Plan

The Panel's Lead Scrutiny Members continue to monitor the Leisure Services Plan and regularly meet with the Assistant Directors of Leisure Services to discuss issues.

4. WORK PROGRAMME

4.1 Workshop

A workshop was organised to set the Panel's future work programme. Members' discussions produced a varied list of issues which need to be investigated by the Review Panel. Future issues to be discussed by the Panel include: - role of leisure in helping young people enjoy and achieve, improving car free access and travel arrangements in the management of the tourism destination, working relationships with Town and Parish Councils on leisure matters and improving access for young people to leisure facilities in town centres.

5. OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN'S COMMENTS

I do not agree that the report accurately reflects the outcome of the Panel discussion on the continued use of sun beds in our Leisure Centres, against the advice of the British Medical Association, the Institute of Environmental Health Officers and a host of other well informed organisations and individuals. The debate was interrupted at one stage by the Portfolio Holder who announced that he wasn't going to change his mind whatever the Panel decided and there was therefore no subsequent vote to support or to reject the Officers recommendation. The majority of Members present voiced serious concerns about the wisdom of continuing with this policy.

Cllr D Harrison

Lead Member for Leisure

6. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

I thank all members of the Panel for their effort and cooperation and similarly to all officers concerned, for their support and dedication during this committee year. It has been an enlightening experience.

Cllr R J Neath

Chairman, Leisure Review Panel