

# Report of Review Panels for 2008/09





## REPORT OF THE REVIEW PANELS FOR 2008/09

### 1. OVERVIEW

The 2007/08 year had been characterised by change, with a significant number of new Councillors elected and a new senior management structure. This had inevitably influenced the degree to which each Panel could undertake any detailed reviews of topics in their areas of responsibility. There had inevitably been a greater emphasis on learning about the Council's activities and how services operated. This information has been drawn on this year, allowing better, in depth examination of some topics and firm recommendations for actions.

A number of trends have emerged during this year. Several of the panels have spent a significant amount of time looking outwards into the local community, receiving presentations on a wide range of topics, particularly where the organisation involved provides essential services for local people. Examples have included the presentation to the Housing Panel on the Nightstop service for vulnerable young people, which ultimately led to the Portfolio Holder making a grant to support the organisation; work by the Employment, Health and Wellbeing Panel with the Breast Screening Service to ensure that a site for the mobile unit is available in Lymington again, in the future; and work between the Leisure Panel and young people, leading to concessions for young people travelling to the Council's Leisure Centres by public transport. In some instances, however, while the presentation has increased Members' local knowledge, it has not led to any specific outputs or recommendations.

Another trend has been topics emerging through a service related review process and going on to be developed on a more corporate basis through the Corporate Overview Panel. Examples include the need for parish and town councils to be assisted with computer technology to allow them to access planning applications on line, and no longer be sent paper copies of plans. This project started within the Planning and Transportation Panel's remit, and indeed they are maintaining a watching brief on progress in this area. The Corporate Overview Panel moved forwards the wider aspiration of extending the local councils' access to a greater range of systems, using equipment provided by this Council. Similarly, a review of the way in which the Council's Geographical Information System could be used more effectively for Commercial Services' operations, initiated by the Environment Review Panel, led to a wider review of GIS through Corporate Overview, and indeed a joint project with some local councils to add their information as additional layers to the database and to allow them access.

The Panels continue to be a forum for consultation prior to a significant topic progressing to Cabinet for decision. The Planning and Transportation Review Panel, normally in joint meetings with the Planning Development Control Committee has been closely involved in the Local Development Framework and the Core Strategy for the District. This has been a key area of work which has been supported by good joint working arrangements with key stakeholders so that the proposals that have come forward have been largely uncontroversial amongst our Members.

While the Panels have an active role in performance measurement, they also serve a useful purpose in maintaining a "finger on the pulse" on a wide range of topics. In particular, the Corporate Overview Panel receives a range of annual monitoring reports such as the Annual Employee report, Treasury Management and Complaints monitoring reports.

### 2. CITIZENS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PANELS

The Panels continue to actively use both the Citizens' and Young People's Panels to gather information to help them understand community needs and aspirations both in

general terms and to support specific reviews. Panel Members are starting to take an active part in the process, including the design of questions to be asked. A number of Panels identified this year that the Council was not making full use of the information gathered. It has been agreed that in future a more detailed report will be submitted to Panels following a review within their subject area, setting out the responses received and allowing a proper debate and evaluation of the findings.

### **3. PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT, LEAD SCRUTINY AND BUDGETS**

The Panels continue to be involved in monitoring performance against the key targets set each year. In addition to advising on the targets that are set, the Panels look carefully at the reasons why any key target is not met.

This year has seen the introduction of a new system of performance management based on Portfolio Plans. Each Portfolio Plan includes the key corporate aims and priorities that apply, defines portfolio-based responsibilities and reviews current performance against target based criteria. This sets the scene to allow a proper evaluation of past performance and informed debate on future service priorities, key objectives and the consequent direction of resources. The Panel found the new process most helpful, allowing them to examine and contrast competing priorities in order to make recommendations. The Panels' debates on resourcing were more detailed and searching than in recent years. Members welcomed the new Portfolio Plans.

The Portfolio Plan debate had already largely defined the subsequent budgets for services, although the deteriorating global financial situation meant a continuing drive to achieve savings. Overall, the process seemed better informed, with better engagement with Panel Members than in previous years, when the budget had been identified as one of the key areas in which the role of the Panels should be strengthened.

The focus provided by the Portfolio Plans is now carried through into more streamlined service plans which have greater emphasis on action plans tailored to deliver the priorities that have been identified. Through this system, there is a better focus on and alignment with the corporate priorities.

The work of the Lead Scrutiny members has continued, but this role is based on the interplay between the lead scrutiny members and their service heads and consequently little formal business comes to the Panels through this route. The style of contact between services and lead scrutiny members continues to vary, having evolved to meet the individual styles of both service heads and Members.

### **4. CALL INS**

There have been no call ins this year.

### **5. NOTICES OF MOTION**

Two Notices of Motion have been referred to the Panels by the Council this year. The Planning and Transportation Panel looked at safety along the A31 near Ringwood in the light of a Notice of Motion suggesting a reduced speed limit. The Panel identified a number of potential safety measures, in addition to a reduced speed limit, which were brought to the attention of the Highways Agency. The Highways Agency have responded that the pattern of accidents suggests that reducing the speed limit will have no effect on safety, but have indicated a willingness to work with the Council on other suggestions, such as warning signs for traffic queues.

The other Notice of Motion, which was referred to the Employment Health and Wellbeing Panel for investigation, was about the Strategic Health Authority's proposal to add fluoride to water in the Totton area. Following extensive research, the Panel

recommended that this Council should object, and this view was supported by the Cabinet. The Strategic Health Authority has nonetheless, despite the level of opposition, decided to proceed.

The Council's processes in responding to both of these Notices of Motion were proactive, with Members actively engaged in the process and formulating firm recommendations on a way forward.

#### **6. PETITION**

A petition on dog fouling, which was handed to the Leader of the Council, was referred to the Employment Health and Wellbeing Panel, although the Officers had already responded to avoid a delay. The Panel confirmed the response which had been made.

#### **7. GREEN AUDIT**

The Green Audit has continued under the auspices of the Green Audit Project Board, appointed by the Cabinet, with reports being submitted to the Corporate Overview Panel and Environment Review Panel. As the first phase of the audit is completed, it is likely that the Environment Review Panel will take the main lead in progressing and monitoring this work, with the involvement of the Corporate Overview Panel as necessary.

#### **8. THE FUTURE OF SCRUTINY IN NFDC**

The current system of Scrutiny in NFDC and the current Panel System has been in place since 2004 following a review of scrutiny undertaken by myself and Cllr Mrs M Robinson in 2003/4. That review looked at scrutiny over 3½ years from the end of 2000, the start of the cabinet/scrutiny arrangements.

Over the past 5 years scrutiny has been modified and updated in the Council as this report indicates, but I believe that towards the end of the current year we should consider instigating a further detailed review of scrutiny procedure in the Council, with a report to the Council to be brought forward by the end of 2010 or the early part of 2011, to be effective (if changes are recommended), following the 2011 Elections. It is now 5 years since the current system was brought into being, and will be 7 years at the next election. I shall be proposing to the Corporate Overview Panel later this year that such a review is started

**Cllr John Ward**

Chairman Corporate Overview Panel



# CORPORATE OVERVIEW PANEL - 2008/09

## **1. MAJOR REVIEWS**

### **1.1 Review of Representation on Outside Bodies**

In January 2008 the Panel appointed a Working Group to investigate the representation on outside bodies in terms of value and benefits to the Council.

The Working Group, comprising Cllr Hutchins, Pemberton and Mrs Robinson met on three occasions and gave regular updates to the Panel as the project progressed.

In summary, the project resulted in the Cabinet agreeing:-

- That future appointments are made where there are benefits to the Council and/or inhabitants of the District, or a clear connection in terms of grant funding.
- Clearer criteria for selection of members for appointment, including future work on matching skills and knowledge.
- That councillors representing the Council on outside bodies produce brief written reports at least annually and that these appear on ForestNet.
- Discontinuation of representation on 22 outside bodies from the list.
- Amended representation on a number of other bodies.

These measures were adopted in full by Cabinet in December 2008.

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

### **2.1 Working with Parish and Town Councils**

The Panel has considered ways of improving working relationships with parish and town councils. The main points to come out of the document were:-

- The agreement to the suggested action points partly in connection with the Statement of Partnership.
- The acknowledgement of existing regular meetings between NFDC and the Clerks and Chairmen of parish and town councils, and the NFALC Executive.
- Various initiatives, including the provision of ICT equipment, which were aimed at maintaining relationships and improving communications and joint working, and these would be built on in taking the Action Plan forward.

## **2.2 Customer Access to Council Services**

The Panel considered proposals for the development and improvement of a customer access strategy in order to meet key corporate objectives and consolidate initiatives linked to continuing improvement in providing services to residents and visitors.

## **2.3 Corporate Procurement Strategy 2007/2011**

The Panel received a progress report on the Corporate Procurement Strategy. This topic had been a major project overseen by the Panel in recent years, and the Panel continued to keep abreast of developments. Good progress had been made generally across a wide range of procurement related activities in the Action Plan. The key themes were:-

- Providing leadership and building capacity
- Partnership and collaboration
- Doing business electronically
- Stimulating markets and achieving community benefits

## **2.4 Review of Test Valley Partnership Arrangements, including Scrutiny**

The Panel received an update on a review of the Test Valley Partnership arrangements. The Panel noted the proposal to streamline the Partnership arrangements at both member and officer level. Both Authorities remain committed to and supportive of the joint working arrangements.

## **2.5 Corporate Overview Panel Risk Management Session**

Together with other members of the Council, the Panel attended a Risk Management Session on 20 November 2008. The session involved a short presentation on the benefits of Risk Management and how the discipline was being applied at NFDC. Members noted that, although the Council had already been using Risk Management principles for some time, one of the initial elements of the new Risk Management Strategy would involve recording identified risks as a simple and proportionate response. This would be followed by a Likelihood and Impact Assessment. In this way, Risk Management would become embedded in the organisation so that it was an inherent part of report writing and decision making.

In order to gain a better understanding of Risk Management principles, Members undertook a group exercise to identify risks and opportunities associated with the economic downturn. This highlighted the value of examining issues from all angles, and that what at first seemed a negative environment might have some positive aspects upon which the Council might capitalise.

## **2.6 Local Strategic Partnership Review/Partnership Review**

Members considered the achievements of the LSP and its agreed development plan to move the Partnership forward. It was recognised that, whilst it was difficult to gauge the Partnership's added value in terms of implementing issues that would otherwise

not have happened if the Partnership had not existed, it was true that relationships between the participants were positive and fostered good co-operation on joint projects. Regular reports would be brought to the Panel once or twice a year as a preliminary to scrutinising the Partnership.

## **2.7 Community Engagement Grants 2008/09 and Rural Communities Assistance Fund 2008/09**

The Panel has monitored the position with the use of these funds. The Rural Communities Assistance Fund was to be used to provide a series of events across the District during February 2009 to assist businesses to survive the recession.

## **2.8 Corporate Consultations – Including Citizens’ Panel and Young People’s Panel**

The Panel received a presentation on a selection of results from the Young People’s Panel and the Citizens’ Panel undertaken in November 2008 on the Council’s Communications and how effective they were in reaching parts of the community.

## **2.9 Review of Members’ IT Provision**

The Panel considered various issues relating to IT provision for members following the Panel’s request to receive a “half term” report on the benefits or otherwise of recent changes in arrangements. A key element of the changed arrangements was the introduction of an allowance for the purchase of IT equipment, rather than the Council providing equipment and ancillaries. A recent survey among members found that the allowance scheme provided flexibility and members were generally happy with the new arrangements. The Panel recommended the continuation of the ICT allowances, whilst asking that they continue to be monitored and reviewed. The Panel was not in favour of the ICT Allowance being incorporated within the Basic Allowance received by all members.

## **2.10 Write Offs**

The Panel has recommended to Cabinet that the new Code of Practice for write offs be approved for implementation from 1 April 2009 and that an annual report be submitted to the Corporate Overview Panel to facilitate monitoring.

# **3. PROJECTS**

## **3.1 Geographic Information System (GIS)**

The Panel has received regular reports on the role of the Council’s Geographic Information System in operational management for Commercial Services, e.g. for identifying land ownership for issues such as grass cutting. Over the course of the year progress has been made towards creating a more integrated system, which would lead to improved customer service.

## **3.2 Council Tax Benefit Update**

At their March 2008 meeting members had requested that officers report to a future meeting on maximising take-up of Council Tax Benefit. Cllrs Mrs Smith and Vickers had met with officers to look at take-up measures and what future action was required.

A report suggested a strategy for future take-up, and officers undertook to decide on the level, timing and nature of activity to encourage take-up.



## **4. PRESENTATIONS FROM EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

### **4.1 Presentation from Community First**

The Panel received a briefing paper and presentation from Mr Michael Clowes, Chief Officer, Community First New Forest (CFNF), and Dr Ian Mason-Smith, Chairman of CFNF.

CFNF was an “umbrella organisation” for the voluntary and community sector in the New Forest. Its income, which totalled £1.3 million, included £86,000 from New Forest District Council. The Panel noted the organisation’s broad remit and the professional way in which it conducted its operations. The Panel concluded that member links between NFDC and Community First could be strengthened and this, together with other issues, would be developed and taken forward.

### **4.2 Citizens’ Advice Bureaux (CAB)**

The Panel received a presentation from Mr Dick Whittington about the role of the four CAB’s in the District and their relationship with the Council.

Approximately 1.9 million people had approached the CABs nationwide during 2007/08 and a further 7.3 million used the CAB self-help website. Citizens’ Advice Bureaux had helped people deal with nearly 5.5 million new problems in 2007/08. The most common problems were:-

- Money and debt
- Consumer and utilities advice
- Employment and housing

In 2008/09 the Council’s annual grant to the New Forest CABs was approximately £250,000, which represented the majority of their total budget. The CAB were delivering against national indicators, including stronger communities, participation in regular volunteering, supporting vulnerable people and independent living, and helping the overall employment rate. The future plan was to merge the four bureaux into a single legal entity by 2010, being managed by a single Joint Action Board providing better managerial cohesion and a single strategic interface with its partners. Work was being undertaken on customer access, including electronic advice, a single telephone number, and enhanced internet access.

## **5. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT – PORTFOLIO PLANS**

5.1 The November meeting of the Panel was the first at which the new Portfolio Plans were considered. The Portfolio Plan objectives were to enable:

- (i) the Corporate Plan aims and key targets to influence the development of all services;
- (ii) current performance to be reviewed;
- (iii) value for money to be demonstrated;
- (iv) future service performance targets and actions to be set within the context of the impact they have on local taxpayers and service users both in 2009/10 and the medium term;
- (v) realistic Council-wide medium term financial plans to developed; and
- (vi) feedback from the Portfolio to be considered by Cabinet.

Overall, the new plans were seen as an improvement on the previous system where budgetary information and performance issues had been considered separately. Key

officers concerned had met after the November cycle of meetings to consider the further development of the Portfolio Plans and processes around them, including the assessment of potential changes to the Constitution in line with the new Corporate Plan, treatment of fees and charges, service action plans and the roles of Lead Scrutiny Members.

## **5.2 Key Achievements 2008/09 and Proposed Key Targets 2009/10**

Members noted that performance had improved over the last two years, with 81% of key targets being achieved in 2008/09, as opposed to 75% in 2007/08. Of the 16 targets set for 2008/09 for the two portfolios under the Corporate Overview Panel, only 2 had not been achieved. The Panel agreed to request the Cabinet to consider the addition of a target to reduce employee absenteeism between 2009 and 2012, as part of the review of the Council's People Strategy.

## **6. REGULAR OR ANNUAL REPORTS**

### **6.1 The Panel received the following Annual Reports:-**

- Annual Complaints Report 2007/08
- Annual report on Treasury Management Service and Actual Prudential Indicators 2007/08
- Annual Employee Report 2007/08
- Green Audit – Update
- Local Area Agreement progress report

## **7. WORK PROGRAMME**

- 7.1** On 23 May 2008, the Panel held a workshop to develop their Work Programme for the forthcoming year. The Panel will be revisiting its Work Programme at the June 2009 meeting.

## **8. OPPOSITION SPOKESPERSON'S COMMENTS**

The panel seems to be working well as a group although much of its programme continues to be around review of existing processes. Having said that I was very pleased with the outcome of the long awaited review of outside bodies. Along with many other members I look forward to seeing the new policies embedded in the future.

The new way of reviewing the portfolio plans certainly seems to be more meaningful to members but we would not welcome the loss of the 'lead member' element of the process.

Cllr Maureen Robinson, Finance and Efficiency Shadow Portfolio Holder

Cllr David Harrison, Policy and Resources Shadow Portfolio Holder

## **9. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS**

The work of the Corporate Overview Panel comprises aspects across the whole range of the responsibilities and duties of the Council. The preceding paragraphs of this report adequately give a resume of the work we have been involved in this year.

I would like to thank all members of the Panel from both political groups who have contributed during the year to the work of the panel. In particular I thank those who are Lead Scrutiny Members who have been involved with officers throughout the year

monitoring aspects of Council business relating to their Lead areas, and to Cllr A Tinsley, the Panel Vice Chairman for his continuing support.

Thanks must also go to Executive Management Team – Dave Yates, John Mascal and Bob Jackson - and all officers who have been involved in preparing reports, attending Panel Meetings, and keeping Lead Members up to date. Personally I give specific thanks to Andy Rogers, the Committee Administrator, for the support he has given to me during the year.

**Cllr John Ward**

Chairman, Corporate Overview Panel



# CRIME AND DISORDER REVIEW PANEL - 2008/09

## **1. MAJOR REVIEWS**

### **1.1 Car Crime**

The Panel used the statistical information held on car crime, which is a priority for this area, to increase their understanding of how to read and analyse crime statistics. In the light of this information, the Panel went on to review whether there were any gaps in the current responses from various partner organisations. A special, extended, session was devoted to this work.

This area already had a very pro-active approach through the Community Safety Partnership and key initiatives such as Operation Cobra on car crime, the targeting of prolific and priority offenders, the targeting of resources through crime analysis and priority setting through Partnership tasking groups had already significantly decreased car related crimes. More, however, can always be done and key themes emerged relating to the need for greater communication between some agencies and, for example, drug rehabilitation services; and also the need to encourage greater reporting from the public, who often concluded that it was not worth taking these crimes to the police. Local business contacts may be useful in bringing more information forwards on these crimes. The Panel have tasked the lead scrutiny members with developing an action plan for future consideration by the Panel.

Another issue of concern related to the security of funding for the local Community Safety Partnership which may prejudice some of the most successful initiatives on car crime in the longer term.

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

### **2.1 CCTV**

This issue has been the source of some disquiet for the Panel during the past year. The

Panel were consulted on and supported the process for tendering for the maintenance of the current CCTV system and were pleased when the tender that was accepted offered savings on the previous maintenance costs. The new contract includes the replacement of some infrastructure to ensure that the system continues to operate effectively.

The Panel also supported the principle that the tender should include the possibility of extending the current system to other town centres should the opportunity arise. By combining the tenders in one, the best possible price could be secured for any extension, which would be also be properly integrated with the existing system. In the event, it was decided to extend the system into New Milton and Hythe, without further evaluation and consultation through the Panel. Members consequently remained concerned about whether this was the most effective use of the Council's resources, to address perceptions of and actual crime and disorderly behaviour in these town centres. On balance, they concluded that proceeding with the extensions into New Milton and Hythe should go ahead, not least because public expectations had been raised and there was evidence that perceptions of safety improved following the installation of CCTV.

## **2.2 Funding of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership**

Along with the Portfolio Holder, the Panel have been very concerned, throughout most of the last year, about future funding for this District's Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. Changes to the way in which the Government directed financial resourcing meant that the District was left with statutory responsibilities, while all the funding was sent to the County Council, without any ring fencing to ensure that the District received its fair share. Together with the Portfolio Holder, the Panel tried to influence the County Council to make a fair settlement. For a number of months, the County did not give any undertakings on this issue. In the event, some funding has now been secured for the short term, but there remains concern about the continuity of funding for key projects in this area. Part of the problem is that this District has different priorities and consequently a different range of projects to urban areas, which have formed the main basis for setting priorities for funding through the Local Area Agreement process.

## **2.3 Monitoring of Anti-social Behaviour and the Targeting of Resources**

The Panel undertook a review of the way in which nuisance behaviours were recorded and analysed by the Crime Analyst employed by the Community Safety Partnership. This information, together with other sources, informed monthly meetings of the Police Operational Tasking Group who allocated available resources such as police officers, accredited community safety officers and police community support officers. The Panel was satisfied with the arrangements that were in place.

## **2.4 Emergency Planning – Service Level Agreement**

The Panel has maintained a watching brief on the measures being considered for meeting this Council's statutory responsibilities in emergency planning. This function was being provided through a service level agreement with the County Council, but problems in the early part of the agreement period had promoted an evaluation of other options. In the end, it was agreed that the revised service level agreement that was negotiated with the County Council was the

## **2.5 Operation Nemesis**

This initiative has been launched by the Police who are taking a more integrated and targeted approach to tackling burglary in the County. The Panel will be kept advised of the results of this trial.

## **2.6 101 Contact Telephone Number**

This is another topic on which the Panel has kept a watching brief. The latest understanding is that the Police will fund the 101 number themselves for the coming year. There was talk of offering Councils the opportunity to “buy in” to the service but no details have yet been finalised and reported to the Panel for their consideration.

## **3. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

### **3.1 Portfolio Plan and Budgets**

In common with the other panels, the Portfolio Plan formed the basis for establishing priorities for action for the Council and as a consequence where resources should be directed to best effect. In general terms, the Panel found that the process was an improvement on previous years and provided welcome context for their discussions. However, when the Panel went on to consider the revenue budgets in January one item, in particular, raised questions of principle about the way in which the system for the preparation of budgets operated and the degree to which Panels had the opportunity to properly evaluate significant proposals. The budget change in question was the decision that this Council would no longer part fund two Accredited Community Safety Officers (ACSO's) based in Totton. Bearing in mind the previous interest that the Panel had shown in evaluating the relative merits of the ACSO service to this Council, and also that this expenditure represented a significant proportion of the Crime and Disorder Portfolio budget, there was some concern that the issue should have been identified as being worthy of being examined more rigorously by the Panel to allow informed advice to be given to the Portfolio Holder. It was recognised that the proposal had been contained within the Portfolio Plan and earlier budget papers, but the detail presented did not allow for the necessary rigorous evaluation to take place. The Panel asked that, in future, such significant proposals be drawn to their attention at an earlier stage to allow them to take a full part in the evaluation process. In addition the Panel wanted to properly evaluate both the financial and social consequences of each of the Crime and Disorder Key Targets as they were formulated.

### **3.2 Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment 2008 and Rolling Partnership Plan**

The Panel has been consulted on the Plan as it has evolved to guide the priorities of the New Forest Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership in the coming years. A Strategic Assessment is prepared initially which establishes the situation locally and draws out local priorities. Meeting these priorities forms the basis of the Partnership Plan, which includes individual action plans for each priority. This includes measures of performance. This time, the Panel was invited to attend the Partnership's Workshop and took part in a robust and rigorous challenge of the priorities

### **3.3 Citizens' Panel and Young People's Panel**

The Panel continues to use an annual survey through the Citizens' Panel and Young People's Panel to track changes in perceptions of crime and fear of crime. The Panel have requested that, in future, they should receive a proper analysis of the findings of each survey, at meetings, so they can fully discuss their implications.

## **4. PANEL PRESENTATIONS**

### **4.1 Work with Young People**

The Panel are very interested in the work being carried out under the auspices of Hythe and Dibden Parish Council and the Handy Trust to meet the needs of young

people along the Waterside to influence the quality of their life outcomes and consequently reduce problems with their behaviour. Following a presentation and discussion session on the Trust's work, further research is being carried out with other town and parish councils to establish what is being done, across the District, and to promote the value of positive intervention schemes.

#### **4.2 Drug and Alcohol Abuse**

The Panel has had an initial look at both of these topic areas, on the basis that substance abuse fuels other crimes and also violence. On drug usage, the Panel have concluded, in the light of information from the police, that there is a serious lack of resources available to tackle the issue, which is therefore continuing within communities, relatively unchallenged. The Panel do not however have any direct influence over this issue and could not identify further action that they could usefully take. As Licensing Authority, this Council does have some ability to influence alcohol availability and its consequent abuse. This topic is being pursued further over the coming months. Other Panels will be invited to participate in the light of the health consequences of alcohol usage.

### **5. OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN'S COMMENTS**

This year the Panel has looked at a varied range of issues, whilst not covering them all in great detail it has dealt with topics such as car crime which hitherto have not been addressed before. The addition of a special meeting was a useful precedent for future more detailed scrutiny of specialised community safety issues. All the more important for the Panel to have a more detailed knowledge base to be an effective contributor to future "Meet the People" sessions.

The funding of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership has been a cause of concern as it is vital to many New Forest District community safety projects and sits as one of the key concerns of this and future years. A structured solution with the County Council to continue to provide this important funding needs to be major priority for the Portfolio in the coming year. The failure to properly scrutinise the strategic decision to stop funding the ACSOs in

Totton has to be seen as a continuation of the District Council's approach to the whole ACSO issue, whether it was their original introduction, ongoing assessment or final termination, the Panel has been marginalised at all these times. A more focused and detailed approach to scrutinising these strategic budgetary decisions in the future must be a fundamental improvement for the Panel's scrutiny role to be effective.

**Cllr M S Wade**

### **6. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS**

- 6.1 Over the past year the Panel has had very full agendas for each of the regular Panel meetings. This has meant that there has often been insufficient time to cover some topics to the depth they deserve. To improve this situation an additional special extended meeting was introduced dedicated to a specific topic, car crime, as a trial. This meeting was open to all Councillors and proved to be very successful. On the basis of that success I feel we should hold further similar meetings focussed on crime and disorder topics, which would be open to all Councillors to attend, for typically 2 extra extended meetings each year. The topic would be selected by the Panel members. Also in some areas there is an overlap between Review Panels, particularly in youth matters, and there would seem to be a good case for combining the members of one or more panels into a single extended extra meeting on a common topic.

There have been two scrutiny activities which the Panel felt they had not been able to scrutinise fully. In the case of the value of CCTV this had been discussed a number of

times in depth in previous years and accepted in principle but the long promised extension to Hythe and New Milton, both having crime problems, was considered to be under scrutinised. Similarly the removal of NFDC funding for the ACSOs in Totton, who still remain located in Totton, was felt to be under scrutinised. For the future any substantial budget shifts arising within the Portfolio, however initiated, will need to be scrutinised more closely by the Panel, possibly by a dedicated meeting, to ensure the Panel is fully satisfied with the outcome.

Looking forward the Panel is likely to become more involved in the scrutiny of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership activities in the future and also need to attend 'Meet the People' activities. Funding of the former is a serious concern as early intervention has very successfully reduced crime levels in the New Forest area but it could rise again if the funding moves away to County level priorities.

**CLlr J Penwarden**

Chairman, Crime and Disorder Review Panel





# EMPLOYMENT, HEALTH AND WELLBEING REVIEW PANEL - 2008/09

## **1. MAJOR REVIEWS**

### **1.1 Strategic Health Authority Consultation : Fluoridation of Water in Southampton and South East Hampshire**

In pursuance of the Panel's previous wish to investigate this matter, and in response to Cllr Mrs Wyeth's motion agreed to the Council on 21 July 2008, (urging the Strategic Health Authority not to proceed with the fluoridation of the water supply in Southampton and South East Hampshire), the Panel considered the issue following members' attendance at the investigations undertaken by Hampshire County Council, and Southampton City Council and considered recommendations to the Cabinet on the Council's response to consultation on this issue. The Panel had appointed the Panel Chairman, Cllr Mrs Rostand, as their representative on the Hampshire County Council Water Fluoridation Panel which involved members from Eastleigh and Test Valley Borough Councils. Southampton City Council had undertaken its own review of fluoridation and the Employment, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder, Cllr Mrs Holding, had attended these sessions on behalf of New Forest District Council. The evidence gathered from these sessions had been set out in a report to the Panel, drawn up by officers in consultation with members involved. After hearing all the evidence, the Panel recommended that, in support of the motion proposed by Cllr Mrs Wyeth, the Council oppose fluoridation of the water supply by Southampton City NHS Primary Care Trust in the Totton area for the various reasons stated by members during the meeting. The Cabinet supported this view.

**1.2** Despite this opposition, the Strategic Health Authority has opted to proceed with fluoridation as proposed.

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

### **2.1 Leader+ Project Familiarisation**

The Panel received details of the Leader+ project, which was designed to support rural businesses and community groups in the New Forest using £2.2 million of European funding. The new Leader programme for 2008/2013 would focus on farmers, large scale commoners, local producers and foresters.

### **2.2 Workplace Health and Wellbeing**

Following a request from the Panel, members noted current health and wellbeing initiatives for employees. There was substantial evidence linking the workplace and employees' health and wellbeing. The workplace was a major cause of stress and promoting health in the workplace was an international priority (World Health Organisation 2007). Health and wellbeing was one of the 6 themes of the Council's People Strategy. Healthy and well employees were more productive and therefore had a direct impact on the performance of the Council.

The Panel agreed to a cross-service project team being set up, a survey (conducted in January 2009) and an update report in March 2009. The survey analysed employees' habits in travel and exercise, and sought to identify their preferences for work-based health and wellbeing activities. A range of actions, including provision of exercise and activity sessions, is being considered.

### **2.3 Equality Standard – Scrutiny and Monitoring**

The Panel has considered its role in the scrutiny and monitoring of the Council's Equality Standard Accreditation. It has agreed that its Work Programme include annual scrutiny of the Council's self-assessment of its performance against the Equality Standard in June each year.

### **2.4 Older Peoples' Action Plan**

The Panel considered the Older Peoples' Action Plan, which had been agreed in consultation with the Community Action Network (CAN).

### **2.5 Community Meals**

The Panel considered the suggested price for community meals for 2009/10 and made a recommendation to Cabinet. The Panel also supported the proposal to market HCC/NFDC provided meals commercially, if practicable.

### **2.6 Tourism Update/Input into Tourism Survey**

The Panel received a brief update on the Tourism Service. The 2009 edition of the Council's Tourism Strategy was being prepared in consultation with the National Park Authority and supported by other organisations and agencies, including the Tourism CAN. The Strategy would be submitted to the June 2009 Panel meeting and for public consultation at the end of the year. The service was working with European railway and airline companies on a Northern European Tourism campaign.

### **3. PRESENTATIONS RECEIVED FROM REPRESENTATIVES OF EXTERNAL BODIES**

#### **3.1 West Hampshire Out of Hours Service**

The Panel received a presentation from Mr Paul Anfield, Service Manager, West Hampshire Out of Hours Service. The Panel agreed that the Health and Wellbeing Citizens' Panel survey for 2009 would include a question on people's awareness of the Out of Hours Service. The survey results would be brought to the June 2009 Panel meeting. Mr Anfield would be invited to this Panel meeting to give an update on the work of the service.

#### **3.2 National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE)**

The Panel received a presentation on the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) and its role in improving the health and wellbeing of the District's population through NICE public health guidance. NICE guidance was relevant because it helped local authorities fulfil their role to promote the economic, social/environmental wellbeing of communities. Any member of the public (or an organisation) could, as a stakeholder, suggest topics for NICE to investigate by completing an on-line stakeholder's form. It was open for the Panel or member to do this too.

In noting the presentation, the Panel requested a report on the benefits of internal initiatives at NFDC to improve the health and wellbeing of employees (see paragraph 2.2).

#### **3.3 'Cook and Eat' Scheme**

The Panel received a report and presentations on initiatives to improve nutrition, tackle obesity, and encourage healthy living, particularly among young people in the District. The Panel received a presentation from Ileana Cahill, Health Improvement Practitioner, Hampshire Primary Care Trust, on the Healthy Schools Initiative in the New Forest. Part of this initiative included a Healthy Schools "Cook and Eat" Scheme, which ensured that children had the opportunity to learn about different types of food in the context of a balanced diet and how to plan, budget and prepare meals.

The Panel also heard about NFDC's own "Cook and Eat" Scheme aimed at child obesity. A survey among pupils at Wildground Junior School had found (before the various initiatives were started) 87% of children did not have breakfast, which led to the introduction of a breakfast club at school. This had resulted in children becoming more attentive, better behaved, and achieving better results.

#### **3.4 Local Involvement Network (LINK)**

The Panel received a presentation from Mr Martin Cox, Chairman of the Hampshire Local Involvement Network (LINK), for patient and public involvement in health and social care services for Hampshire. LINKs had been set up to provide everyone in the community, including individuals and voluntary groups, with a more effective chance to say what they think about local health and social care services. They were intended to give local people an enhanced opportunity to influence how services were planned and run and provide feedback to services about what was working and what was not.

The Panel noted that anyone could join the Local Involvement Network and participants could register for any consultations on particular health issues, such as

mental health, cancer treatment etc. Three public meetings were intended to take place around Easter 2009 when the LINKs would be publicised.

### **3.5 South Central Ambulance Service**

The Panel received a presentation from Mr Rob Kemp, Head of Operations at the South Central Ambulance Service. The Panel heard details of the Service Development Plan, current and new performance targets, demands on the service and future developments. They also received a breakdown of performance statistics for response times, how they varied geographically, and the new management standards. The new Emergency Operations Centre had speeded up the response through process improvement and redesign and also through recruitment of extra staff. Mr Kemp would be invited to attend a future Panel meeting to report on progress.

## **4. RESPONSE TO PETITION**

### **4.1** The Panel noted the content of a petition from Marchwood Junior School, concerning dog fouling, together with the Council's responses and the results of a survey among town and parish councils on dog control in the context of the Dog Control Order – Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005.

The Council had responded to the petition by letter, setting out the way in which the problem was addressed by the Council. The Panel were satisfied with this response. The Panel considered the introduction of Dog Control Orders, particularly for dog fouling, and that consultation should be done with the town and parish councils and other land owners wishing to include their land within any Order, to ensure consistency across the District on enforcement basis.

## **5. PROJECTS**

### **5.1 Breast Screening**

In late summer 2008, the Panel were informed that there appeared to be doubts over the future of breast screening in Lymington. A breast screening unit was due to be sited at Waitrose in the centre of Lymington in July 2008. However due to complications over the provision of the external power point on the site when it was changing hands between supermarket firms, screening was not undertaken here in Lymington but instead the Unit used Hythe Medical Centre as a site. The Panel took an interest in this issue and asked officers to investigate to see what the Council could do to assist, and for a report to be brought to the Panel once the outcome was known. NFDC officers then met with personnel from the Screening Unit and from Waitrose at Lymington, and had reached an agreement which would allow the Unit to return to the site at Lymington Town Hall in 2011. This is when the next round of the three yearly screening is due. This was a good example of how the Panel's involvement resulted in improved access to breast screening and thereby improving health and wellbeing in the local community.

## **6. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

### **6.1 Portfolio Plans**

The November meeting of Employment, Health and Wellbeing Review Panel was the first at which the new Portfolio Plans were considered. The Portfolio Plan objectives were:-

- (i) the Corporate Plan aims and key targets to influence the development of all services;
- (ii) current performance to be reviewed;
- (iii) value for money to be demonstrated;
- (iv) future service performance targets and actions to be set within the context of the impact they have on local tax payers and service users both in 2009/10 and the medium term;
- (v) realistic Council-wide medium term financial plans to be developed;
- (vi) feedback from the Portfolio to be considered by Cabinet.

Overall, the new plans were seen as an improvement on the previous system where budgetary information and performance issues had been considered separately. Key officers concerned had met after the November cycle of meetings to consider the further development of the Portfolio Plans and processes around them, including the assessment of potential changes to the Constitution in line with the new Corporate Plan, treatment of fees and charges, and the roles of Lead Scrutiny Members.

## **6.2 Corporate Consultations**

The Panel has had input into a health survey which was to be undertaken among the Citizens' Panel in March 2009, which will involve questions on the following issues:-

- Asking the NFDC Citizens' Panel to sign up to LINK for participation in any health consultations they may be interested in
- Smoking legislation – positive and negative outcomes
- Access to mental health services and effectiveness of dementia strategy
- Cooking initiatives
- Drinking initiatives
- Access to health centres
- Drug services

The Panel was making good use of the Corporate Consultations system, with members being nominated to help plan certain questionnaires, and slots being reserved for 2009/10. Results of the surveys would be received by the Panel in detail.

## **6.3 Key Achievements 2008/09 and Proposed Key Targets 2009/10**

The Panel has reviewed the Portfolio's key achievements for 2008/09 and supported key targets for 2009/10.

## **6.4 Smoke Free Legislation**

The Panel were pleased to note the success of the introduction of smoke free legislation in the New Forest District and the work of the Environmental Health Service in securing compliance with smoke free law.

## **7. OPPOSITION SPOKESPERSON'S COMMENTS**

### **Major Reviews**

Following extensive consultation and consideration of the evidence submitted the

Liberal Democrat Group supported the panel's objection to the fluoridation of the water supply in Southampton and South East Hampshire. We suggest that reviews of updates on the dental health of the local population over the next decade would be useful.

Other items where an issue was considered from information gathered and presentations from outside bodies

The calibre of presentations was generally high and a great deal of useful information has been gained. In particular presentations on the Out of Hours service, Nice ,and Links were very informative.

We feel that the Link (Local Involvement Network) organisation is still in the very early stages and that it would be useful for the panel to continue to monitor the creation of this very necessary service to consider whether it is able to fulfil its stated objective of "allowing the local people the opportunity to influence how services are run and to feed back to services what was working and what was not. "

There are also problems in the North West of the district with times for emergency ambulances which should be noted.

The panel's involvement in the improvement of breast screening facilities in Lymington was welcomed.

### **Performance Management**

Consideration of budgetary information and performance issues together is seen as a great improvement in working practices for the panel

### **Corporate Consultations**

We welcome the opportunity to be involved in corporate consultations through the citizen's panel and hope that the information obtained can be fed back into the panels work programmes.

**Cllr Dr Miranda Whitehead MB BS MRCS LRCP**

## **8. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS**

I feel that this is a good comprehensive report that covers the wide range of areas that this newly-formed panel has been asked to cover.

Despite the considerable time and effort spent by various members of the Panel covering the Fluoride Consultation, we were disappointed at the eventual decision by the Strategic Health Authority.

We have asked for the follow up on a number of issues covered in the past year, including the Older People's Action Plan and the West Hampshire out of Hours Services.

I shall be asking the Panel to consider a future agenda item on the Air Quality Action Plans for Sulphur Dioxide levels in Fawley.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all members of the Panel for their enthusiastic input, and to the officers for all their support and hard work over the past year.

**Cllr Mrs A Rostand**

Chairman, Employment Health and Wellbeing Review Panel



# ENVIRONMENT REVIEW PANEL REPORT - 2008/09

## **1. MAJOR REVIEWS**

### **1.1 Garden Waste Collection Scheme**

The Panel have maintained an overview of the operation of the Garden Waste Collection scheme since its inception and supported its extension to cover the entire District. The Scheme continued to do well, achieving the requirement not to operate at a loss. The budget still had to reflect the loss of income from the sale of the old "grey sacks" which increased the financial burden on the service, and the Panel concluded that this situation was now somewhat unfair and should be phased out.

In general terms the collection scheme was doing extremely well and was contributing towards the Council meeting its targets for recycling performance. The scheme progressed to the point that the current vehicles and collection rounds were operating at full capacity and the demand for the service was increasing. The Panel evaluated a number of potential options and concluded that the most effective way forwards would be to introduce Saturday collection rounds, particularly for rural properties with narrow accesses. This would increase the overall capacity of the service. The Panel also identified the need for a transfer station to serve the eastern part of the district, in order to reduce unproductive journey times. The Panel encouraged continuing discussions with the County Council to seek a resolution.

The Panel's recommendations were implemented by the Portfolio Holder.

### **1.2 Geographical Information System**

When reviewing potential topics for their work programme, the Panel had identified that the Council's Geographical Information System had the potential to be very helpful in improving the efficient operation of the work teams operating from the depots but, at that time both the systems and the access arrangements did not allow best use to be made of the information that the Council held. The Panel established a

task and finish working group to look at the issue. Work on the GIS System progressed extremely well over the following months, for example allowing land ownerships on public open space to be held in an accurate, accessible form so that it was clear where the ground maintenance teams should be working. The depots also achieved direct access to a version of the GIS database. Work on GIS is continuing with the inclusion of additional layers of information from the Council's records, particularly on land ownerships and obligations. The Panel are however now satisfied that the operational needs of Commercial Services are being met.

### **1.3 Green Audit and the Environmental Implications Paragraph in Reports**

The Council has been undertaking a fundamental review of the sustainability of its operations under a Green Audit Process. Because of the importance of this issue, the initial stages have been undertaken by a Green Audit Project Board, appointed by the Cabinet. Ultimately however, the sustainability agenda lies with the Environment Portfolio and is therefore likely to fall within the purview of this Panel. For this reason the Panel have been kept up to date on progress on the Green Audit.

As part of the Green Audit process, the Panel undertook to review the content and value of the "environmental implications" paragraph that should be included in all reports considered within the Council. The Panel established a small task and finish working group which evaluated how effective this paragraph was in practice. The Panel concluded that insufficient attention was currently being given to the wider, sustainability, implications of proposals and that improvements should be made to the content. One contributing factor was that there had never been any guidance developed as to what constituted an environmental implication that should be taken into account. The Panel agreed a number of ways in which the use of this paragraph could be improved and made recommendations to the Green Audit Project Board.

### **1.4 Cemeteries Regulations**

The Panel appointed a task and finish working group to review the regulations operating in the Council's cemeteries. Of particular concern was the operation of the lawn cemeteries at Blackfield and Eling. Historically, the lawn cemetery controls had not been enforced, leading to a proliferation of decorations, kerbing, fencing and surfacing materials which created management and safety issues. Following consideration of the issues, the Working Party concluded that, in view of the previous laxness, it would be impossible to take a strict stance over the existing lawn areas at Blackfield and Eling, although people would have to recognise that practical management of the plots must occur without hindrance. For new areas however a much more pro-active approach would be taken to ensure that the lawn concept was retained. A similarly rigorous approach would be taken to the new woodland burial areas. Revised regulations were prepared for consideration by the Panel in March 2009 and these were commended to the Cabinet for adoption. The new Regulations reflect practical advances, such as the need to ensure anyone installing headstones etc was properly qualified and approved by the Council.

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

### **2.1 Land Drainage and Development Control**

The Panel visited the land drainage section at the Town Hall, Lymington to gain a clearer understanding of their work. In the light of increasing problems with flooding, the Panel wished to understand this Council's role in prevention and also responding to incidents. The Panel was satisfied that the Section already took a pro-active approach and had, for a number of years, been developing a database of information on drainage and flooding related issues that was now an extremely valuable tool. They



were a little hampered in their information gathering in that local planning authorities were not obliged to share information, for example on new Sustainable Urban Drainage schemes, although it was expected that this requirement may well be imposed in due course. Since the development control process could benefit significantly from information held by land drainage, with a view to preventing or mitigating future problems, the Panel indentified the need for the development control sections of both this Authority and the National Park Authority to have better information sharing systems in place with land drainage. Progress was being made on improving the exchange of information with this Council's development control service and the Panel's interest promoted the introduction of similar arrangements with the National Park Authority.

A seminar was arranged for Members of both local planning authorities to explain how the new arrangements would work.

The Panel also recommended revisions to the Land Drainage Strategy to reflect this Council's current ability to respond to flooding incidents. The Strategy had been developed in a time when the Council had grater resources to respond, for example in the distribution of sandbags. The emphasis, driven by central government, was that householders should now be much more self reliant. The suggested changes were implemented through a Portfolio Holder's decision. Further changes to the Strategy will be made following a more fundamental review, which is scheduled to take place shortly.

## **2.2 Coastal Erosion – Failure of Sea Defences and Promenade at Milford on Sea**

The Panel was kept updated on work to respond to the failure of the sea defences and loss of a stretch of promenade at Milford on Sea. The Council had responded immediately to secure the situation and prevent further loss, and obtained funding from central government to cover the cost. Using the coastal modelling undertaken by the coastal defence team, a successful application was made for significant funding to achieve a longer term solution. The Panel was please to note that the council's investment in a high quality coastal defence team paid dividends in securing government assistance, in the face of stiff competition from other areas, when there was a practical need.

## **2.3 Coastal Defence – Communication with the Community**

Coastal Defence issues can be extremely sensitive and controversial. In addition to flooding incidents, the District also contains areas where coastal erosion and cliff slippage are causing concern to householders and also having an influence over property values and people's decisions about whether or not to buy property. The Panel looked at the communication systems in place with town and parish councils and also with individuals who were making specific enquiries. While there were regular contacts between the coast defence team and Milford on Sea Parish Council, Fawley Parish, Lymington and Pennington and New Milton Town Councils did not have the same level of contact and dialogue. The Panel suggested that increased contact should be made with these Councils. The Panel also suggested that an information leaflet should be prepared to answer some of the standard questions that were asked by the public, for example about the implications of the cliff slippage at Barton on Sea. At present, a significant amount of officer time was spent, with individual people, on an ad hoc basis, answering their questions, normally in association with proposed property purchase. In the event, however, the Portfolio Holder did not support this course of action and leaflets were not produced.

## **2.4 Public Conveniences**

Members of the Panel have been involved in the process of evaluating alternative

systems for renovating and replacing public conveniences. It was important that the Council's public conveniences were easy to keep clean and maintain, resistant to vandalism and also discouraged problem behaviours where people could congregate. An alternative, module based system was identified and experience in other areas suggested that this type of provision could be extremely successful. An added advantage was that the modules could often be slotted into existing buildings, which could already be well integrated into their local surroundings. The Panel supported the use of the new module system to renovate the public conveniences in Fordingbridge, representing a significant saving over the originally projected cost of total replacement. The operation of these conveniences will be kept under review to ensure that they do deliver the promised savings and improved resistance to vandalism and other problem behaviours.

## **2.5 Refuse Collection and Recycling**

The Refuse Collection and Recycling Working Party continued to examine a number of potential options for increasing the Council's performance in recycling through waste minimisations and also additional options for recycling activity. The current area for consideration is the trade waste collection service for both recyclable and residual waste.

## **3. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

### **3.1 Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005**

This wide ranging legislation had a large number of environmentally related controls and had consequently been placed under the auspices of the Environment Review Panel to review performance. The Panel reviewed the way in which the Council had implemented various enforcement provisions contained in the Act, particularly through the use of fixed penalty notices.

The Council has undertaken the statutory consultation exercise necessary before control could be imposed over supermarket trolleys, in an attempt to mitigate the effects of them being abandoned around some towns. In addition, work has been carried out with town and parish councils to seek a co-ordinated approach across the district to dog fouling of public land. These issues would be visited again in due course. The Development Control Enforcement Team was experiencing significant practical problems in pursuing instances of cars being sold on the highway and this remained a significant nuisance in some areas. The culprits were well aware of the system and were successfully exploiting the available loopholes.

Members reviewed the powers available to issue fixed penalty notices on offences such as littering, fly-posting and fly-tipping. The Council had decided to adopt a "soft touch" approach to enforcement, and had trained existing officers and delegated powers to them to issue fixed penalty notices. In effect through, these additional duties were secondary to their main roles and very few fixed penalty notices had been issued. While the County Council's Accredited Community Safety Officers and Police Community Support Officers also had powers to issue fixed penalty notices, the Panel concluded that the enforcement resource available to the council was insufficient to make any impact on these problem behaviours. They favoured the employment of a dedicated resource, but concluded that, in the current economic climate, such additional resource bids should not be made.

### **3.2 Test Valley Partnership**

The decision to alter the nature of the relationship with Test Valley Borough Council will have a long term effect on the work and role of the Environment Review Panel. The Partnership Scrutiny Committee undertook the performance review of many of the

operational functions of Commercial

Services and, to avoid unnecessary duplication, the Panel had consequently not undertaken any work in this area. While the Partnership continues, on the ground, the management structure has changed bringing accountability for the service in this District back to this Authority. Once the new arrangements are fully operational, the Panel will be taking on this area of work, but to date this has been judged to be premature.

### **3.3 Abandoned Vehicles**

The Panel reviewed the first year's operation of the new County wide contract for the collection and disposal of abandoned vehicles. The new operator of the contract was based in Botley. After some initial teething problems while the contractor had learnt the District, performance had been very good. The target for the removal of vehicles after initial investigation was comfortably exceeded. There were still some problems in investigating reports of potentially abandoned vehicles, which was a result of the size, scale and diversity of the Forest. Overall though the Panel was satisfied with the contractual arrangements and supported the Council entering into a Memorandum of Agreement with the County Council for the provision of this service.

### **3.4 Portfolio and Performance Plan**

The Environment Panel welcomed the introduction of the Portfolio Plan which brought all the key information together to allow them to evaluate trends in performance and where priorities should be directed in the future. The Panel supported the Environment Portfolio Plan including its priorities for the future.

## **4. OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN'S COMMENTS**

- 4.1** There have been many positive outcomes from the work of the Environment Scrutiny Panel over the past twelve months. Debate has been mostly open and non-political. The panel has enjoyed excellent support from a team of committed officers, and our grateful thanks are due to them for keeping us fully informed and managing our deliberations with tactful firmness.
- 4.2** It's been good to see the success of the green waste collection scheme, though I believe that the original charge was set too high and may have discouraged many from joining. It has however meant that for the time being the Council does not need to invest in further collection vehicles.
- 4.3** The implementation and enhancement of the GIS system is very welcome, not only for the work done by our council but also for parish councils who are now more easily able to manage and audit their own land and built assets.
- 4.4** On the coastal protection side, it was good to see the efficient and timely repair of the storm and tidal damage suffered by Milford's waterfront. I would however support the publication of an FAQ sheet on coastal issues of interest to current and prospective householders in the District, which could be supplied to parish councils and estate agents, thus saving officer time spent on individual enquiries.
- 4.5** As the council's designated lead member for scrutiny of the Project Integra Strategic Board, I am a little disappointed that other PI member authorities have been tardy in reporting back on trials aimed at broadening the range of recyclables collected from the kerbside, specifically glass and kitchen waste. For this reason we have been unable so far to respond to calls from residents to widen the scope of recyclable collections.

Hopefully this issue will be resolved by 2011/12 at the latest.

- 4.6** The implementation of firmer, fairer policies on the management of cemeteries is laudable, and the recent improvements to toilet facilities in some towns and villages have enabled outdated installations to be replaced. Enforcement of the prescriptions of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act is not yet being consistently implemented across the District. This could be a serious issue in such a popular tourist area, but the work of the highly dedicated Street Scene teams continues to ensure that our towns and villages generally present a welcoming and tidy face to visitors.
- 4.7** Finally I must highlight the excellent work done by the Green Audit Board in creating a framework within which the Council can strive to meet the challenges of climate change and mitigate its potential impact on the District. It is a significant step in getting both members and local residents on board to ensure the preservation of our unique environment and the lives of those who live within it.

## **5. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS**

- 5.1** What a busy year! I thank all my colleagues on the Environment Review Panel, and the Officers who have advised and guided us for all their hard work and dedication across all the matters which we have discussed this year. Our environment has become one of the most important issues of our time, and I am most grateful that the New Forest District Council, Members and Officers, are enabling us to recognise this not only in our own lovely District but also in the wider world. .

**Cllr Ms C Ford**

Chairman, Environment Review Panel



# HOUSING REVIEW PANEL - 2008/09

## **1. MAJOR REVIEWS**

### **1.1 Bed and Breakfast and Hostel Accommodation**

The Panel considered the number of placements in bed and breakfast and hostel accommodation and the conditions and suitability of this type of accommodation. They explored the demand for this accommodation and whether that offered was in good condition. The Panel heard that regular inspections were undertaken on all accommodation used by the Council. The Panel felt that the Council should be less reliant on bed and breakfast placements and should look to alternatives. Members would continue to monitor the use of temporary accommodation and decided that a review of hostel accommodation should be undertaken in the spring.

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

### **2.1 Rent Arrears**

The Panel discussed the current rent arrears process including the charging and collection of rent. Of particular interest was how officers manage vulnerable tenants and those consistent 'bad payers'. Members recognised that the Income Recovery team worked hard to provide support to all tenants and worked closely with other agencies to assist vulnerable tenants. Members also recognised that the team had to strike a balance between supporting tenants and ensuring that rent arrears did not escalate. Members agreed to continue to monitor the rent arrears process on an annual basis.

### **2.2 Statistics on Rough Sleepers**

The Panel reviewed the current methods used to determine the number of those

sleeping rough and whether the methods adequately reflected the number of people sleeping rough in the District. The Panel concluded that undertaking headcounts to determine this number was insufficient in such a large rural area where those sleeping rough in hard to access places would be missed. The Panel heard that a new method of counting had been developed, initially by using information from the housing application form and then further questioning of applicants by Housing Advisors. Housing officers were happy that this investigatory method was the best way to gauge whether an individual was sleeping rough. The Panel were particularly concerned with the increased demand for housing assistance as a result of the recession, and believed that Housing officers should continue to consider all applications on their own merit in these difficult times.

### **2.3 Disabled Facilities Grant Waiting List**

The Panel considered the current waiting list for disabled facilities works. The list had increased over the last two years due to increased demand and staff shortages. The Panel were pleased to hear that two officers had been employed in the housing improvements team and the waiting list would be reduced by 30 cases per month. Members felt that the list should be monitored and decided to review the situation in 9 months time in order to allow the new team time to clear the backlog of cases.

## **3. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

### **3.1 Housing Service Plans**

The Panel's Lead Scrutiny Members continue to monitor the Housing Service Plan and meet with the Assistant Director and Senior Housing Officers to discuss key issues affecting the service.

### **3.2 Housing Portfolio Plan/Finance and Expenditure**

The Panel has considered its first housing portfolio plan. The Panel heard that the Plans had been developed to better align performance with the expenditure planning process. The Portfolio Holder in presenting the plan made reference that in setting targets she would ensure that the quality of the housing service would continue whilst providing value for money. The Panel felt that the new reporting arrangement highlighted the effective dialogue between the Housing Head of Service and the Portfolio Holder in managing performance and resources. The Panel joined the Portfolio Holder in congratulating the Head of Housing and Housing officers for their continued hard work.

**3.3** The Panel in considering future targets and future expenditure, expressed their increasing concern regarding the strain on resources. The recession had further exacerbated an already precarious housing budget. The Panel had long had concerns regarding the fall in right to buy sales and the revenue generated through this and were concerned that sales would decline further in the future. The Panel also expressed concern regarding the way in which central government calculated and allocated its grant funding to the Council. Of primary concern to members was the impact this would have on residents and tenants of the Council. The Panel would be discussing a future options paper for the Housing Service in the autumn.

### **3.4 Performance Indicators**

The Panel continues to monitor performance indicators for the Housing Service. The Panel are happy with the performance of the service and are sympathetic to its problems regarding the provision of affordable housing and reducing the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

#### **4. PANEL PRESENTATIONS**

- 4.1** 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.
- 4.2** The Panel presentations have included private sector housing, supported housing and the Nightstop service. The presentation from Nightstop resulted in the Portfolio Holder deciding to give New Forest Nightstop a grant of £5,000. Officers have also taken forward suggestions from members on how services could be improved. The Panel will continue to invite key speakers to meetings as they feel that they fuel debate and help further inform members of key issues currently facing the Housing Service.

#### **5. WORK PROGRAMME**

##### **5.1 Tour and Workshop**

The Review Panel undertook a tour across the district where members could examine the differing types of accommodation available to tenants. The tour was preceded by a workshop where Members received presentations on issues affecting the Housing Service. Members used key information from these presentations to develop their work programme.

A similar work programme workshop will be held in the early summer to further develop the Panel's work programme for 2009/10.

#### **6. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS**

Periods of recession are always challenging times for a council's Housing Department. We have recognised that many people within the New Forest will be facing hardship and have reflected this in our agendas over the past year.

We have looked at our monitoring of homelessness and our strategies and working relationships with organisations such as Night Stop, in place to help vulnerable young people and adults. We have reviewed bed and breakfast accommodation and hope to review our hostel accommodation in June.

We have recognised that there are vulnerable people in private sector housing facing difficulties and were pleased that the council was successful with a bid for funds from the Regional Housing Board to help support vulnerable people who were unable to pay for repairs to their properties.

We are fully aware of the growing need for more properties to rent within the District and have been working with private landlords in order to provide more suitable rentable properties.

I would like to thank Dave Brown and his team for their dedication, hard work and expertise over the last year, especially Pauline Lewis and Joanne Luscombe for their work regarding Tenant involvement and the setting up of our new Tenant Forums, ensuring that more of our tenant's views are heard. Lastly but not least, I would like to thank the tenants for their help and support over the last year.

**Cllr Mrs A Hoare**

Chairman, Housing Review Panel



# LEISURE, CULTURE AND YOUTH MATTERS REVIEW PANEL - 2008/09

## **1. MAJOR REVIEWS**

### **1.1 Olympics & Paralympics: Encouraging Participation**

The Panel hosted a discussion with guests from the sports and leisure arena, on encouraging participation in the Olympics and Paralympics. The session produced a healthy debate on the opportunities that the Olympics would bring in terms of promoting the New Forest and the increased access to sport facilities as well as the current activities taking place in the New Forest with partner organisations. Members felt that the Council could do more to assist partners develop current schemes in order to increase sports participation. In particular members discussed whether the Free Access for National Sportspeople scheme could be extended in the Health and Leisure Centres to allow those on the scheme free access to facilities at all times rather than restricting their use to core times. The session received positive feedback from all attendees. The findings of the session have been put forward to the Portfolio Holder for further consideration and action. The Panel would also review this issue when discussing the Sports Development Plan.

### **1.2 Assessment of the Impact of Recent Capital Investment in Coastal Amenity Projects**

The Panel considered the impact of recent capital investment in coastal amenity projects and future plans for investment. Members visited to schemes at Barton, Milford, Keyhaven, Calshot and Hythe. In discussing the need for investment at these sites, in particular the cost of repair works following inclement weather along the coast, members agreed that Councillor involvement should be sought at the early stages of all projects. The Panel will examine this issue on a bi-annual basis.

### **1.3 Review of the Practice in Managing Exposure to Ultra Violet Radiation**

The Panel considered the current provision of sunbeds within the Council's Health and



Leisure Centres. Members explored the health risks associated with sun and radiation exposure and the Council's duty to promote the health and well-being of residents. Members were informed by officers that the usage of sun beds was restricted to 20 sessions per year, per user and that the Council issued guidance to users on UV exposure. On the whole the Panel felt that the Council should offer residents freedom of choice but that the Council should regulate sun bed usage. It was agreed that the provision of sun beds in the Council's Health and Leisure Centres be reduced from eight to five beds and that guidance information be reviewed on a regular basis. The Panel also determined that more could be made of "sun safe" materials relating to Dibden Golf Centre and Keyhaven River.

#### **1.4 Reducing the Number of Sedentary Adults in the District**

The Panel hosted a discussion on the number of sedentary adults in the District and discussed ways in which this number could be reduced.

The Department of Health's Physical Activity Plan 2005 recommended that individuals undertake 30 minutes of exercise five times a week which amounted to 2% of the day. The Panel expressed concerns when told that a recent British Heart Foundation survey showed that 62% of people reported that they would not be motivated to exercise even if their life depended on it.

The Council had recently surveyed its employees to seek their views on how the Council as an employer could assist individuals to better manage their own health and wellbeing as it was recognised by officers and members that the Council would benefit from offering healthy initiatives such as a reduction in sickness and increased motivation amongst staff.

The Panel felt that opportunities for greater activity amongst residents should be created by fully utilising and exploiting the physical and cultural landscape of the New Forest in order to build an environment that supported people in more active lifestyles. It was largely felt that there should be better promotion of the 'Green and Blue Gym' and activities provided by stakeholders.

The Panel decided that local information on physical health and activities should be better promoted through the Council's website and that sporting competitions be explored amongst the local parishes, sheltered housing and tenants schemes. The Panel also agreed that the Council continue to support the work of the New Forest Sport and Physical Activity Alliance. Officers and the Portfolio Holder would consider the suggestions made by the Panel.

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

### **2.1 Reviews of Findings**

After a major review has been carried out by the Panel, the Panel at their following meeting discuss the findings of the review, not only to note and agree the findings but agree on a course of action.

By ensuring that the major reviews are re-examined and followed up, key actions with timescales are agreed and often the Panel looks to scrutinise the progress of these actions at a future date. The Panel hopes that each of the reviews it carries out is of value and informs and makes a difference to the services provided in the Leisure Section.

### **3. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

#### **3.1 Leisure Fundamental Service Review**

The Panel's Lead Scrutiny Members continue to monitor the Leisure Services Plan and meet with the Head of Leisure and Head of Communities and Employment to discuss issues. Lead Scrutiny Members will continue to meet with the two service heads under the new reporting arrangements.

#### **3.2 Portfolio Holder Plan and Budget**

This is the first year of the Portfolio Holder Plans under the new expenditure and performance planning reporting. The Panel discussed at length the impact of the recession on the Leisure Service budget. Of particular concern was decline in the use of the Council's Health and Leisure Centres. The Panel agreed that the Service needed to be flexible and look at innovative ways to retain service users. The Panel would closely monitor the service income in the coming months.

### **4. WORK PROGRAMME**

#### **4.1 Tour**

The Panel undertakes an annual tour of the district to examine different facilities on offer and schemes taking place across the Forest. This year the Panel toured various coastal schemes across the Forest including Barton, Hordle, Keyhaven and Hythe.

#### **4.2 Workshop**

A workshop was organised to set the Panel's work programme for 2009/10. Members' discussions produced a varied list of issues which needed to be investigated by the Panel. Future issues to be discussed by the Panel will include: - Health and leisure centre review, review of arts and heritage partnerships and assessments of the 816 gym and the free swimming initiative.

### **5. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS**

During this Committee year the Panel has undertaken key reviews into areas of the Service that members felt needed monitoring and scrutinising in order to sustain the continuous improvement in the Service itself.

The Panel regularly reviewed and updated its work programme as a result of these key reviews, and supplemented by knowledge gained through tours of key sites around the District managed by Leisure Services. The Panel has set a full work programme for next year which largely focuses on the Health and Leisure Centre provision in the District and looks forward to undertaking these reviews

I am very pleased with the proactive work that the Panel has undertaken this year and thank all members of the Panel for their effort and cooperation and similarly to all officers concerned, for their input, particularly during these uncertain economic times.

**CLlr J A G Hutchins**

Chairman, Leisure, Culture & Youth Matters Review Panel



# PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION REVIEW PANEL - 2008/09

## 1. WORK UNDERTAKEN

### 1.1 Review of Planning Enforcement

In June 2008, the Panel received a report on the Council's Planning Enforcement Service, which had not been reviewed for 6 years. The service undertook a large range of tasks, including:-

- Investigation as to the potential breaches of planning control following a complaint from outside the organisation
- Investigations as to the potential breaches of planning control following a complaint from within the Council
- Prosecutions and Court work
- Planning Appeals
- High hedge complaints
- Certificates of Lawfulness
- Discontinuance Notices
- Keeping the community informed as to enforcement issues
- The Clean Neighbourhoods Act

The report also covered relevant Government guidance and best practice advice, staffing levels and current performance, and proposed service enhancements.

The report contained statistics in the report, which compared the enforcement performance of the local planning authorities in Hampshire from 2004 to 2007. When compared to all other authorities in Hampshire, the caseload of New Forest District Council Enforcement Officers had been significantly above average.

A further report was requested to the Panel in June 2009, giving comparisons of activity and performance of the service.

## **1.2 Update on Vacancies and Commercial Uses in Shopping Frontages / Charity Shops – Business Rates**

In September 2008, the Panel received an update on vacancy rates of shop units in defined shopping areas across the District, and on the split of uses within the primary shopping areas. The report had been requested because of concerns about the changing economic climate, and it was felt useful to monitor the situation. At that time, no dramatic changes had taken place and no action was recommended.

Members commented on the number of charity shops and their effect on the viability of businesses in the town centres, but it was noted that there were no planning controls available to intervene, should this be desired. Officers advised that it would be unwise to change uses in response to the current economic conditions, as these fluctuations in the market were cyclical, and short term fixes sometimes had unforeseen long term consequences. Members queried whether the Council could have any influence on the situation by means of the reduction of discount for business rates charged to charity shops, and whether this was a local or national arrangement. Members requested information on how many reductions were offered to charity shops in the District.

It was subsequently reported that charity shops received an 80% reduction in business rates and this was a national scheme which could not be adjusted locally. It was also noted that charity shops by law were only permitted to sell 20% of new goods by value, for resale. Some members felt that these rules were not being adhered to in some places, and this was difficult to monitor.

A letter was prepared to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State requesting clarification of guidance on these rules and how they could be enforced, for the Portfolio Holder to endorse and send. A reply was received to the effect that the guidance given under Section 64(10) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 gave local authorities discretion to judge each case on its merits.

## **1.3 Lymington Car Parking Study**

The Panel has received updates on the Lymington Car Parking Study, after previously recommending that the Cabinet provide appropriate funding to commission research and surveys with a view to drawing up a strategy to improve transportation and parking facilities in Lymington.

Tenders for research were invited in January 2009 and the contract was planned to be let in March, so that the survey could be undertaken at the peak season in Summer 2009. The findings will be reported in October/November 2009 and will:-

- (i) Determine demand
- (ii) Assess if there was sufficient capacity to cope with current demand
- (iii) Consider 'decking' in the town (small multi-storey car parks)
- (iv) If it was not possible to contain the traffic in Lymington, consider Park and Ride

It was stressed that these were very early investigations and the results of the research would determine whether any of the above measures were necessary. Provision would be subject to the usual regulatory processes and constraints. The use of consultants would be managed using a Steering Group which would make decisions within the financial and contractual boundaries already determined. Members emphasised the need for the research to be undertaken with the advice of local members, who had detailed local knowledge of busy days and seasonal fluctuations.

#### **1.4 Student Transport**

In January a report was submitted to the Panel for them to consider whether they would like to survey the Citizens' Panel and/or Young People's Panel on planning and transportation related issues, to inform and assist their work programme. The Panel decided it would like to ask questions around the topic of the underutilisation of subsidised bus schemes, in particular student transport, and asked to see the draft questions as a panel before they were finalised. Cllr George Dart was nominated to take this matter further.

The Panel subsequently considered areas for consultation and agreed various issues to be included in the questionnaires. The draft questionnaire, which was considered by the Panel reflected discussions between officers and Cllr Dart and input from the New Forest Transport CAN. The Panel made comments to refine the document. The results of the survey would be received in September 2009.

#### **1.5 Local Distinctiveness Work**

The Panel considered proposed work to be carried out in preparing a series of Supplementary Planning Documents to protect and enhance the local character and distinctiveness of various parts of the local areas. Once the work has progressed, a seminar would be arranged for local developers on the new Supplementary Planning Documents. A joint meeting with Planning Development Control Committee would be held at the appropriate time to discuss the operation of the SPDs.

#### **1.6 Annual Monitoring Report**

The Panel noted the Annual Monitoring Report on the progress of the District Council's Local Plan and Local Development Framework. A copy of the 2008 Monitoring Report had been submitted to the Government Office and circulated to all members of the Council. The Panel received a presentation setting out the statutory requirements as well as progress on planning documents, policies and schemes.

#### **1.7 Local Development Framework Core Strategy**

The Panel has received various updates on the Core Strategy and Local Development Framework. The public examination was likely to end in August/early September and if the Strategy is found to be sound, the Strategy will be formally adopted in the autumn.

#### **1.8 New Forest Community Planning Guidance for Parish/Town Councils on their Role in Preparation of Community Plans**

The Panel has considered guidance for Parish and Town Councils when preparing Community Plans. The document had been prepared in response to perceived tensions between Parish and Town Councils and community planning groups. The new guidelines were designed to allow flexibility and avoid prescriptiveness, whilst bringing clarity to the roles in the context of varying circumstances throughout the District using the options set out in the Guide. Members broadly felt the new guidance had gone some way towards addressing the problems described and supported its publication.

#### **1.9 Electronic Plans/Parish Councils**

The Panel received regular reports on the provision of IT equipment to Parish and Town Councils. Hard copies of plans and maps would be withdrawn when the "critical mass" of authorities had been provided with equipment. The Head of Planning ensured the momentum was maintained by being in close liaison with colleagues in ICT Services. It was reported that, by the end of 2008, all Parish and Town Councils within the District had been offered equipment, and if it had been accepted, the

equipment installed. Members congratulated officers for the efficient way in which this project had been undertaken and implemented.

## **2. JOINT MEETINGS**

### **2.1 Joint Meeting With Planning Development Control Committee 17 September 2008 - Local Development Framework (LDF): Core Strategy Submission Document**

The Panel's joint meeting with Planning Development Control Committee considered the Core Strategy Submission document. The LDF Core Strategy set out the strategic framework for the spatial planning of New Forest District outside the National Park over the next twenty years and was a very important document. Any other local development document prepared by this Council would need to comply with it. The meeting tested the soundness of the document in terms of the process followed and the research undertaken to arrive at its present form.

Under new procedures, the intended submission document would be published in order for other parties to make representations, and then it will be decided whether to formally submit the document for Public Examination. The Public Examination into the Core Strategy starts once it is submitted, with the Hearing to be held in June 2009.

It was noted that significant further work had been done on sections dealing with Transport, Affordable Housing and Open Space. The document had been the result of two years work, with a lot of member involvement, including the smaller informal advisory group which had regularly met with officers since the start of the process and which had informed officer reports to formal Panel, Committee and Cabinet meetings.

The focus was on dealing with local issues using a sustainable approach and protecting and enhancing the character of towns and villages. There was provision for some small scale green field development. Affordable housing policies had been reconsidered in the light of further work, particularly on the economic viability of developing existing residential sites at higher densities. The soundness of the plan depended on:-

- Legal requirements
- Local Development Scheme
- Sustainability Appraisal
- That it be justified and effective
- Evidence to prove that it proposed the most appropriate options when considered against other alternatives.

## **3. NOTICE OF MOTION – SPEED LIMIT ON A31 (REPORT A)**

### **3.1 The Panel considered the motion moved by Cllr Thierry and referred to this Panel by the Council at its meeting on 27 October 2008. The motion arose from a significant number of accidents in the area on the A31 and requested a lower speed limit on a section of the A31.**

After hearing the various speakers, the Panel debated the issue and generally agreed with the motion. However, the Chairman pointed out that as the Highways Agency and the Police did not support a speed reduction, for reasons given in the report, he felt that a letter from NFDC to the Highways Agency solely on the 50mph speed limit may not generate the most helpful response.

The Panel then considered a broader response touching on all of the possible measures as a way of persuading the Highways Agency to give their view on the level of priority that the issue was likely to be given, the likely cost and the possible timeframe.

The Panel proposed that the Highways Agency be urged to bring forward a range of

safety measures (including speed detecting congestion warning signs, to be introduced within the next twelve months) and the other measures to improve road safety on the relevant stretch of the A31, as soon as possible. The Highways Agency replied stating that they were already investigating potential locations for warning signs and subject to funding would seek to install these by December 2009. They did not support a reduction of the existing speed limit, as the Police and Highway Authority data did not identify this as a main cause of incidents in that location. They were keen to work in partnership with stakeholders and interested parties to reduce casualties in the areas highlighted.

#### **4. OTHER ITEMS CONSIDERED**

##### **4.1 Comparing Car Parking Charges**

During discussions on proposed parking charges in January 2009, the Panel had requested an analysis of comparative car park fees and methodology against those of other nearby local authorities.

The Councils used for comparison had been chosen for a combination of reasons including geographical proximity, in the same Audit Commission group, or appeared to run a similar parking regime. When considering the use of permit/clock schemes the Panel had to bear in mind that this Council's clock scheme was much larger than other Councils. This Council issued 44,770 clocks in 2008 compared to West Dorset District Council, who issue in the region of 7,000 clocks a year and Southampton City Council who issue some 1,200 annual off street permits for 2008/9.

The main conclusions were

- This Council's town and amenity pay and display charges appear to be broadly in line with other Councils.
- This Council's short stay clock scheme provides for parking at a substantially lower cost than comparative Councils. The scheme operated by this Council is also more flexible than most because is not vehicle or car park specific.
- This Council's long stay clock scheme provides for parking at a substantially lower cost than comparative Councils. As with short stay clocks, the long stay clock scheme operated by this Council is more flexible than other Councils' long stay permit schemes because it is not vehicle or location specific.

The Panel were reminded that, given the scale of the Council's Parking Service, any changes in tariff/income can have a significant effect on income as demonstrated below:-

- A 1% swing in demand would lead to a +(-) £24,000 change in income
- A 5% swing in demand would lead to a +(-) £120,000 change in income

Although mindful that the 2009/10 charges were already set, the Panel felt the information was clearly very useful in informing future charging policy. Members requested it be borne in mind in future years, and brought forward when appropriate.

#### **5. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

**5.1** The November meeting of the Panel was the first at which the new Portfolio Plans were considered. The Portfolio Plan objectives were to enable:

- (i) The Corporate Plan aims and key targets to influence the development of all services.
- (ii) Current performance to be reviewed.
- (iii) Value for money to be demonstrated.

- (iv) Future service performance targets and actions to be set within the context of the impact they have on local tax payers and service users both in 2009/10 and the medium term.
- (v) Realistic Council-wide medium term financial plans to be developed.
- (vi) Feedback from the Portfolio to be considered by Cabinet.

Overall, the new plans were seen as an improvement on the previous system where budgetary information and performance issues had been considered separately. Key officers concerned had met after the November cycle of meetings to consider the further development of the Portfolio Plans and processes around them, including the assessment of potential changes to the Constitution in line with the new Corporate Plan, treatment of fees and charges, and the roles of Lead Scrutiny Members.

## **6. BUDGET UPDATES**

- 6.1** The Panel had requested regular financial updates to keep abreast of the fast changing economic situation and the dramatic consequences for the Council.

The Planning Service had been significantly affected by the economic downturn, with income losses deriving from large falls in Land Charges and Planning Fee income. In both cases, revenue had dropped by 30-40% compared with the previous year, which had resulted in a shortfall of £786,000 by mid-March 2009. Measures were being put in place to address the situation, including adjustment of staffing levels to reflect the drop in workloads in the relevant teams.

- 6.2** The Panel received regular updates on concessionary travel costs, which for a long time were an unknown quantity, pending the final details of the scheme and actual take up. Summer 2009 may give a clearer picture of ongoing costs.

## **7. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS**

The highlight of the year has been the successful generation of the Core Strategy Submission Document for the District. This has now been submitted and it will have its Examination in Public during the first two weeks in June 09. A large amount of work has gone into the creation of this key document and the many subsidiary documents which have to accompany it. NFDC are amongst the first Councils to submit and it is a credit to the professionalism of the officers involved that we are so well placed in this process.

The lowlight of the year has been the rapid decline in revenues associated with Land Charges and Planning Applications. These areas have traditionally generated revenue for the Council and it is not possible to balance the loss of revenue solely by staff redeployment from the Planning Department, such is the size of the gap and the speed with which the revenue has declined. Plans are in place to generate the maximum possible level of sensible savings without prejudicing our ability to support an increased level of work when the upturn occurs. This means that the cost saving burden has to be shared across the Council as a whole.

Looking forward, we are very pleased to see the work on Local Distinctiveness initiated. In recent years, there have been many Planning Applications which have been turned down initially only to be supported on Appeal. These applications have been seen by many residents as having a negative impact on the design amenity of our towns. Under new guidelines local distinctiveness will become a relevant factor in determining an application; hence the importance of this work which will be carried out in conjunction with our local Town and Parish Councils.

**Cllr P Vickers**

Chairman, Planning and Transportation Review Panel



