

Report of Review Panels for 2009/10



REPORT OF THE REVIEW PANELS 2009/2010

1. OVERVIEW

Partnership working presents many challenges to local authorities, not least how to undertake effective reviews of the services and functions that are provided with, and through, other organisations. During the last year there has been an increase in the Panels' interest in and engagement with other agencies on the provision of services for people in the New Forest. While in some instances this has been confined to gathering information on what is being done, there has been a more active evaluation process on some subjects, with the development of recommendations and also views being expressed to influence others. There are examples in the individual Scrutiny Panel reports of successful reviews where Partnership scrutiny has taken place

Although there has been some overlap this year with more than one Panel looking at the Swine Flu Epidemic and also the Floating Support Service for Council Tenants over 55 years old, this is rare and is due to the different focus of interest on the topic. Duplication remains very limited, but is something that should be kept in mind to ensure best use of resources.

Each Panel is continuing to develop its own culture and approach to issues, a practice which I endorse. I believe that the freedom Panels have to determine their own work programmes and to decide how to go about delivering those programmes is a strength of the way our scrutiny arrangements operate.

However, where recommendations are developed and referred on, for example to the Cabinet or the individual Portfolio Holders, I feel that our processes do not yet include robust mechanisms for evaluating what is done with those recommendations and the final outcome of the review process.

Overall, I feel that we have achieved much during the year, and the individual Panel reports reflect this, but that we can continue to improve.

2. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The lead scrutiny member process has been successful within some Panels, but possibly less in others. I am aware of a number of successful lead member teams working directly with officers, but as the system relies on reporting only when there is an issue of note, the degree to which lead scrutiny members are actively engaged with their Heads of Service, and providing a degree of challenge at an operational level, is not always clear.

I think it fair to say that effective Performance Management is proving challenging for the Panels. The Portfolio Plans once again provided a better context for the Panels to evaluate performance in a more structured way, but it appears that we have room to improve the link between performance, future imperatives, and the financial planning. The Corporate Overview Panel has instigated a review to improve financial reporting to all of the Panels. This review will report back in late 2010.

Each of the Panels has looked at performance in individual subject areas, in more detail, on an ad hoc basis. This remains a key area of activity.

3. CALL INS

There have been no call-ins during the current municipal year.

4. NOTICES OF MOTION

There have been no new Notices of Motion during the current year, although the Planning and Transportation Review Panel continues to monitor progress on introducing new highway safety measures on the A31 near Ringwood, following the Notice of Motion on this topic last year.

5. CITIZEN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PANELS

The Panels have continued to use the Panels for research to inform their reviews and to establish the priorities of local people. The Panels have supported proposals to review how such information is gathered in the future. It is essential that statistically valid information is gathered, from a representative cross section of the local population and the Panels recognise that there are some limitations on the Citizen's Panel model in this respect. Members are keen that the most cost effective option for survey work is identified and used.

6. SCRUTINY REVIEW

At my suggestion the Corporate Overview Panel has instigated a fundamental review of the way in which the scrutiny and overview function is carried out in this Council. The review process is being led by South East Employers and their report is expected during May. All Members of the Council will have the opportunity to express their views, as will officers and representatives of partner organisations.

In the current challenging financial climate, it is imperative that the Council continues to make best use of its financial and employee resources. "Scrutiny" has a vital role to play in this respect. I feel sure that the review will help us to recognise where we can improve our approach to maximise benefit to the Council and the people we represent.

Clr J G Ward

Chairman Corporate Overview Panel



CORPORATE OVERVIEW PANEL - 2009/10

1. ITEMS WHERE AN ISSUE WAS CONSIDERED OR INFORMATION GATHERED

1.1 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Strategy 2009-2013

The Panel has considered and recommended to Cabinet the proposed ICT Strategy for 2009 - 2013, which is intended to develop the use of information and communications technology at New Forest District Council in order to achieve continuous improvement across all services.

The Strategy had been drafted after identification of a comprehensive range of requirements for ICT development from a regular consultation process with Head of Services, the Portfolio Holder (Finance and Efficiency) and Lead Scrutiny Members Cllr John Ward and Cllr Mike Shand. It also had regard to other internal and external factors shaping the Council's priorities for the next four years. These requirements had been grouped into seven main development areas:

- Customer Focus;
- Improving Efficiency;
- Information Management;
- The Green Agenda;
- Flexible Working;
- Supporting Partnership Working (at both an organisation level and a case level);
- Developing the ICT skills of employees and council members to optimise the investment in ICT.

The Panel noted that the 'Dragons' Den' system of assessing and filtering proposed IT projects continued to work well and an extra element in the process reviewing the

benefits of the project, some time after implementation, had now been introduced into the cycle.

The Panel Chairman and Cllr Shand as Lead Scrutiny Members, will continue to monitor and contribute to the work of the ICT Services and Strategy, and will report to COP whenever necessary.

1.2 Procurement Strategy

The Procurement Strategy, which sets out how the Council should procure goods and services, was adopted by the Council in 2006, following in-depth work by the Panel.

The Panel receives regular updates on progress with an Action Plan drawn up by the Corporate Procurement Group, of which the Chairman of the Panel is a member. In September 2009 the Panel supported a view that the Strategy should be updated and aligned with the new Corporate Plan, in the context of the E-Governance initiatives and the green agenda, and that the performance indicators should be updated.

Cllrs Vickers and Pemberton have joined the Procurement Strategy Group, in addition to Cllr Ward (the Panel Chairman to work on updating the Strategy).

It was suggested that Cllrs Vickers and Pemberton be nominated to work on the Procurement Strategy Group, in addition to the Panel Chairman, Cllr Ward. A report would be brought to the June Panel meeting on progress.

1.3 Annual Employee Report - 2008/9/Sickness Absence

The Panel receives annually the Annually Employee Report and considered the report for 2008/09.

The Panel supported the management processes put in place for filling or freezing vacancies.

The Panel is concerned at the levels of sickness absence, and has supported the measures in place better to manage these absence levels.

It has requested six-monthly updates on employee sickness absence and received one update. The Panel learned that EMT had been robustly monitoring the levels of sickness across the Council and had put in place a sickness absence Action Plan. The Panel supported the Action Plan and will continue to monitor sickness absence levels.

1.4 Workforce Strategy 2009/12

The Panel has also considered a proposed Workforce Strategy for 2009–12, including a presentation which covered the following elements:-

- Internal and external drivers for the Strategy;
- Current position;
- Future vision.

The Panel were made aware of measures put in place to address anticipated pressures resulting from the financial downturn. It was felt that the Council had been proactive in taking high level action – including vacancy freezes and reviewing staffing structures. This put the Council in a strong position to deal with the future challenges and adverse financial impacts.

1.5 Health and Leisure Centre Sports Hall Floors

The Panel considered various issues relating to the Council's Health and Leisure Centre sports hall floors.

A special joint meeting of the Corporate Overview Panel and the Leisure Culture and Youth Matters Review Panel was held in April 2009.

The meeting agreed to accept recommendations set out in the report, which included an update report to Corporate Overview Panel later in the year.

In addition to the work of the Corporate Overview Panel, the Auditor has independently reported to members on the issue and the Council's review process. The Auditor was satisfied with the internal review and the actions set out within the recommendations agreed by the Corporate Overview Panel.

1.6 Alternative Arrangements for the Council's Catering Provision at Appletree Court

The Panel reviewed proposals to change the method of providing catering at Appletree Court.

Given that there was an unsustainable financial deficit arising from low usage of the canteen by employees, the Panel advised the Cabinet that it supported the proposals to change the method of provision of catering at Appletree Court from an in-house facility to use of an external contractor.

1.7 Review of NFDC Scrutiny Arrangements

At the suggestion of the Chairman, the Panel agreed that a review of the Council's scrutiny system be undertaken. A Working Party comprising Cllr Ward, Cllr Mrs Rostand and Cllr D Harrison was set up, which in turn set out the scope of the review and engaged Mark Palmer of South East Employers (SEE) to undertake it. The Review will comprise of member interviews, a survey, and workshops with member and officer involvement, and is being undertaken over April and May 2010. The implementation date of any changes depends on a number of factors and is yet to be determined.

1.8 Financial Reporting to Members

The Panel appointed a working group to review financial reporting to members. The Group met in December 2009. Conclusions from the meeting were that:

- A process should be developed to assist Review Panels' understanding of individual services finances;
- Post project implementation reviews be considered by appropriate Review Panels;
- As an alternative to formal training, members receive regular presentations on finance before Council/Committees and Panels. These will be built into the Work Programmes of all review panels at appropriate times, in consultation with Panel Chairmen.

The Panel has asked for a report back to the Panel in 12 months' time on the progress made with members' understanding of the Council's financial management and planning process.

1.9 Hampshire Pension Fund 2008/09 – Annual Report

The Panel has received a presentation on the Hampshire Pension Fund 2008/09.

Hampshire County Council, the administering authority for the Hampshire pension fund, had set up a Pension Fund Panel on which the District Council was represented.

The Panel were mindful that Members needed an awareness of staff pensions and the influence the District Council could have on the Pension Fund Panel, to monitor the Pension Fund on behalf of employees.

The Panel wishes to explore in detail the age profile of the District Council employees, the current age profile of current contributors and the number of councillors who are in the pension fund scheme. This information would prove useful when monitoring the pension fund and how any changes could impact on District Council and its staff. The Panel has asked for this information to be included in regular updates on the pension fund.

1.10 Customer Access to Council Services

One of the key themes in the Corporate Plan is “Improving the ease and quality of access to public services for all our customers and citizens.” The Panel has periodically asked for progress reports on this work. The report in March 2010 summarised main aim of Customer Access, the proposed target for 2010/11 and the draft work programme for the Customer Access Group.

The main initiatives included improved customer service by continued and enhanced use of new technologies (such as the interactive website), and maintaining local offices where it was economical to do so.

The Customer Access Group met quarterly to oversee progress towards aim. The Heads of Service with responsibilities for achieving the aim attend the group meetings. Cllr Colin Wise (Portfolio Holder) and Cllr Paul Vickers (Lead Scrutiny) provide member input and attend the group meeting at half-yearly intervals.

The Customer Access Group prepared a corporate work programme before the start of each financial year, details of which were noted.

One of the Council's proposed key targets for 2010/11 is to 'Develop and promote less expensive access channels'. This will include more self-service via the phone and web. This key target will be progressed as part of the work programme. During 2010/11, work will concentrate primarily on payment transactions, which were detailed in the report. Whilst members were pleased to hear of the improvements, they wished to ensure that residents, particularly the vulnerable, were able to pay for Council services in the way they chose.

1.11 Corporate Consultations – Including Citizen's Panel and Young People's Panel 2010 / 2011

As well as routine consideration of bidding for the use of the Citizens' and/or Young People's Panels/Equalities Network in 2010/11, the Panel has reviewed the operation of the Citizens' Panel and Young People's Panel.

The Government encouraged all local authorities to engage regularly with residents to help improve council services to ensure that they were running efficiently and met local need.

The Citizens' Panel and the Young People's Panel have provided councillors and officers with a reliable insight into views, opinions and experiences on issues they have wished to investigate, but the Panel wished to explore other ways of providing the Council with better value for money information and data for use when making decisions.

It was felt that enhancing the quality of consultations and making good use of any

employee time saved would help the Council deliver on its duty to involve and on the delivery of the community engagement framework.

The Panel examined the self selection element of the membership of both Panels and how effective this was in gauging the opinions of the community as a whole. The Panel had in January 2010 suggested various aspects for the review, including costs, achievements, ensuring reliable data was obtained, and minimising duplication of work across the Council.

The Panel has recommended that the Citizens' Panel be replaced by a random sample approach, and that the Young People's Panel becomes internet only.

2. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT – PORTFOLIO PLANS

2.1 Policy and Resources (P&R) And Finance and Efficiency (F&E) Portfolio Plans : Budget Development 2010/11

The Panel considered the Annual reports for 2008/9 and Portfolio Plans for 2009/10 for both portfolios falling within its terms of reference.

In the light of its remit to oversee all aims and topics of the Corporate Plan, the Panel considered an overview of the Council's overall performance in 2008/09, the P&R and F&E key targets for 2010/11, and the changing scene for the Portfolio in 2011/12.

For P&R it was suggested that Pensions should be among the list of Future Risks. The Panel has since received a detailed presentation on the Hampshire Pension Fund, and how the District Council can influence the way it was run. The Panel has asked for regular pensions monitoring reports (see elsewhere in this report).

The Panel found the overall Annual Report of the Council a useful document. Although there were some minor content issues, and future editions would be published at an earlier stage in the Review Panel cycle, members found the format and size was appropriate and a very useful document when considering the overall performance of the Council.

The Panel has endorsed the Portfolio Plan Budget Development for 2010/11 for the Policy & Resources and the Finance & Efficiency Portfolios subject to minor comments.

3. PRESENTATIONS FROM EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

3.1 Treasury Management Issues

The Panel received a presentation from the Council's Treasury Management Consultants, in the context of the current global banking conditions, and their implications for the Council.

The presentation covered the following points:-

- The credit crisis – origins and consequences
- Lessons for local authorities
- Monitoring methodology
- Credit ratings
- Future implications

The Panel has heeded the advice that local authorities should pay close attention to the official investment criteria and should continuously monitor counter parties (organisations in which the Council invested) and were advised that officers were keeping this under constant review.

The Panel also considered the Annual Report on the Treasury Management Service and Actual Prudential Indicators 2008/09.

Usually, the in-house fund has out-performed the highest fund averages, but it has not done so over the last year due to the significant turbulence and decline in the money market. The in-house managed fund performance at 31 March 2009 stood at 6.33%, falling just short of the 6.48% industry average, but far exceeding the benchmark of 3.69%. The Panel still felt this was a very good achievement in the context of the global market conditions.

The Panel will continue to monitor Treasury Management performance.

4. OTHER REPORTS RECEIVED

- Final Accounts 2008/9 Bad Debts Write-off
- Contract Standing Orders Waivers 2008/9
- Complaints Annual Review 2008/9
- Treasury Management Performance Report – 1 April – 31 October 2009

5. OPPOSITION SPOKESPERSON'S COMMENTS

I would like to support the Panel Chair's sentiments in thanking the panel members and officers for their contributions during the course of the year. A full range of issues have been considered and it is pleasing to note that a number of the outcomes have contributed to the efficiencies that the council is having to make.

Having said that, some members believed that more could have been learned from the Health and Leisure Centre Sports Hall Floors issue where the council lost a considerable amount of public money through poor project oversight and the consequent loss of a legal case. In addition to this waste of public resources, the episode caused a great deal of unnecessary commercial damage to the contractor involved. An internal review identified a number of areas where improvements needed to be made in the council's processes and this practice was endorsed by our auditors. However pressure from some members to ensure that governance is appropriately robust to prevent future failures of this kind faced party political resistance within the scrutiny panel. As a result I believe the Council has not gained full assurance that all lessons have been learned from this episode.

I am pleased to see that the Panel Chairman has succeeded in his wish to review the Council's scrutiny arrangements. I am aware that members from both political groups are dissatisfied with the way overview and scrutiny is operating at present and I am sure that such a review is timely. I hope that all members keep an open mind so that when the report is presented, the necessary improvements are put in place as soon as possible.

CLlr Mrs M J Robinson

6. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

The Corporate Overview Panel has overview of the full range of the responsibilities and duties of the Council. This time last year I announced my intention to commence a review of the Scrutiny procedures in the District, and the Panel supported my request to undertake such a review earlier 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 members who have been involved with officers throughout the year monitoring aspects of Council business relating to their Lead areas. Particular acknowledgement to Cllr Andrew 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 Members up to date.

Personally I give special thanks to Andy Rogers, the Committee Administrator, for the support he has given to me during the year.

CLlr J G Ward

Chairman, Corporate Overview Panel



CRIME AND DISORDER REVIEW PANEL - 2009/10

1. MAJOR REVIEWS

1.1 Car Crime

Following on from the major review carried out in 2008/09, the Panel drew up an action plan to try and improve the effectiveness of organisations, including this Council, in tackling car crime. This included the provision of cards, through the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, for display in the windscreen saying that no valuables had been left in the vehicle. Some 15,000 of these have now been distributed.

The Panel also received a presentation from the Police and other partners on how they responded to reports of car related crimes and how they were improving their techniques to improve their effectiveness.

Part of the action plan included trying to involve local body repair businesses in encouraging the reporting of vehicle related crimes, as the information gathered from official sources indicated there was significant under reporting. Under reporting impeded the development of intelligence based targeting of problem areas. Unfortunately the body repair businesses did not respond to invitations to meet. As an alternative, the Panel considered the use of a questionnaire to ask the businesses to provide information on the damage to vehicles that they were seeing as a result of car crime. It was originally intended that members of the Panel would take the questionnaire around and make contact with the businesses. In the event, the majority of members of the Panel did not feel that this was something that they wished to do, and as there were no resources to employ someone to carry out this task, this initiative was abandoned.

1.2 Alcohol and Assaults/Disorderly Behaviour

This area of work has been the main focus of review activity for the Panel during the year. Substance abuse had been identified as one of the promoters of car crime, where theft was used to fund the dependency habit. Further investigation then established that the funding for treating alcohol dependency (£80,000 for Hampshire in 2008/09) was much lower than that allocated to drugs rehabilitation (£3 million for Hampshire for 2008/09), even though alcohol abuse was much more widespread in the local population and, arguably, causing greater harm.

The Panel received information from the probation service and their contractor, Crime Reduction Initiatives, on the use of Alcohol Treatment Orders, which were enforceable by the Courts, where alcohol was identified as one of the factors contributing to offending behaviour. The Panel was concerned to note from this, and subsequent information gathered, that the thresholds for the imposition of Alcohol Treatment Orders were being raised during this year, meaning that many fewer people would receive help through this route. This was particularly worrying as there were already long delays in accessing some types of treatment, particularly for residential detoxication and rehabilitation placements. Alcohol was often a factor in domestic abuse and other offences involving violence and the consequent effects of this lack of provision were therefore very worrying. The statistical information gathered suggested that such alcohol treatment programmes were successful in retaining participants through to completion of the course and in achieving much better control of their drinking behaviour.

The Panel commissioned research through the Citizens' and Young People's Panels on the patterns of alcohol use by young people. This was tied in to research carried out by the Thomas Coram Foundation on the motivation and other factors which contributed towards young people drinking, and also with medical research which highlighted the particular dangers of alcohol consumption for young people. These findings have been passed on to the Hampshire Drug and Alcohol Action Team and to local schools. Members also decided that it was important to move the review process forwards by looking at the 10 point plan developed by the Drug and Alcohol Advisory Service for tackling alcohol related problems. The Portfolio Holder has also used this information to produce advisory letters and leaflets for distribution through schools.

The review is continuing. The most recent source of information was a presentation from the Chairman of the local Drug and Alcohol Reference Group on their role, within the context of the various other organisations involved in this field, in tackling substance abuse. The information gathered has now been compared back against the key questions that the Panel had decided needed to be answered. As an outcome of this process, the Panel have identified further questions that need to be answered about the provision of drug and alcohol treatment services in the Forest and established that these need to be asked of the commissioning agencies, mainly the County Council based Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) and the Primary Care Trust. The DAAT and PCT will be requested to share the information that they used to prepare for the current invitations to tender to provide the service in the New Forest District.

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

2.1 CCTV

Following the acceptance of the new contract arrangements for the maintenance of the CCTV system, and also its extension into New Milton and Hythe, the Panel monitored performance under both the maintenance contract and in installing the extensions. The Panel continues to receive regular updates on the commissioning of the CCTV extensions and progress in addressing the technical problems that are delaying the installation of the last camera in Hythe. The Panel will continue to monitor the performance of the CCTV system

2.2 Arrangements for the Scrutiny and Overview of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership

Parts of the Police and Justice Act 2006 that require the District Council to establish a mechanism to undertake the scrutiny and overview of the local crime and disorder reduction partnership came into force in April 2009. The Panel gave considerable thought to the best way forwards, recognising that this function must add value to the activities of the Partnership, and not just add another layer of bureaucracy. Following some internal evaluation of the options available, the Partnership was invited to attend the meeting in November to share their views on the best way forwards. It has been agreed by all parties that a light touch needs to be taken, with any scrutiny reviews being identified from the Partnership's work programme. In accordance with Government guidance, the Police Authority has been co-opted onto the Panel for any reviews of issues relating to community safety. Representatives of other partner organisations will be co-opted on to the Panel as necessary, also as non-voting members, to meet the needs of each review undertaken. The Panel has been formally designated as the body to undertake this function, with the necessary changes made to their Terms of Reference.

The Panel also highlighted the need to ensure some co-ordination between authorities to avoid duplication of reviews across the County. In addition to being a waste of resources such duplication could create a significant burden on the partner organisations to support the process. This issue is now being discussed at a county level.

2.3 Outreach Work with Young People

In the previous year the Panel had looked at the work carried out by the HANDY Trust with young people along the Waterside and had been impressed by this model for a positive approach to encouraging young people into positive patterns of behaviour, away from more anti-social activities and attitudes. Following that meeting, the then Chairman, Cllr Penwarden, had contacted each of the town and parish councils in the District to see what they were doing with young people and also to establish if there was any demand for additional support. Responses were received from 12 parishes of varying size. It was obvious that work was being done with young people across the District although many of the smaller parishes were not able to offer much in the way of involvement with their young people, who in any event would tend to look to the larger settlements for entertainment and social contact. The Panel concluded that this Council could not usefully play any role in promoting provision of this kind for young people and ended the review process.

2.4 Emergency Planning – Swine Flu

Fortunately, Swine Flu turned out to be much less severe in its effects than originally feared. Never-the-less, the Council was pro-active in its preparations in advance of the onset of a possible epidemic affecting not only a significant proportion of the population but also the Council's own employees. Local businesses were also encouraged to plan for the continuity of their operations.

The Panel maintained a watching brief on the Council's planning for swine flu and received regular updates to satisfy themselves that the appropriate level of planning and response was in place.

2.5 FOSPLAN

The Fawley Off Site Plan is in the final stages of being updated to take account of the recommendations that were made following the inquiry into the Buncefield explosion. Key lessons had been learned, not least about the need for greater planning for recovery after the immediate emergency response. It can take households and businesses many months to resume normal activities following such an incident and they may need prolonged help. The updated plan was presented to the Panel, as part of the consultation process prior to its formal publication. The Plan has been written by the County Council's emergency planning team on behalf of the local resilience forum. The Panel questioned some of the content to satisfy themselves that there had been proper consultations, and that the plans for areas that may be affected were soundly based.

The Chairman has asked for one issue, relating to the arrangements for dealing with the flow of tankers and HGV vehicles and the management of their turnaround, to be brought back to the Panel for further evaluation in due course.

2.6 101 Contact Telephone Number

This is another topic on which the Panel has kept a watching brief while the situation evolved over a period of months. The Police finally took over responsibility for funding the 101 non emergency contact number. They offered to route calls on to other agencies for the payment of a fee. The Panel recommended that this Council would not receive good value for money for such a payment as there was no ability for the Council to respond out of hours and the information would be routed through to the Council, in due course, by other means.

The government has now pledged to roll out the 101 number as a national non-emergency contact number.

2.7 The Confidence Agenda

The Panel have received an initial presentation, setting the scene on the "Confidence Agenda". While contact with all official agencies, including this Council, influences the way in which the public perceive the actions and effectiveness of the police force, the Panel have concluded that this is not an issue that should be a high priority for them to examine. In addition, locally the police are introducing a number of initiatives to improve the flow of information to local people, such as the introduction of beat newsletters and e-mail contact groups. Successful communication between the police and the public is the most important factor in improving confidence that the police will respond. The Panel will come back to this issue when these measures have been in place for a while, to look at their effect. In the meantime, the Panel will receive survey results on perceptions of crime and anti social behaviour in the area. This information is in the process of being collated, following an extremely good response to a survey of 6000 randomly selected residents. The response rate is in the order of 25%.

3. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

3.1 Portfolio Plan and Budgets

This was the second year in which the Panel had the opportunity to review performance and make recommendations for the emerging portfolio plan in a more structured approach. The Panel questioned some statements within the "Looking back at 2008/09" report for the Crime and Disorder Portfolio and asked for amendments to be made to the emerging Portfolio Plan to reflect their concerns. They also asked the Portfolio Holder to take account of their view that the fear of crime was an issue that warranted continued attention during 2010/11, even though the worry indices were beginning to decline.

3.2 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.

3.3 The Panel's Own Procedures for Review

In order to improve the effectiveness of reviews, at the Chairman's suggestion, the Panel have adopted new procedures that ensure that each review is subject to proper debate at the outset to establish exactly what questions need to be explored, and building in an information evaluation exercise, to check the information gathered against the original objectives, to see where additional information needs to be gathered. It is also intended that the revised process will lead to more firm recommendations for suggested courses of action.

4. OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN'S COMMENTS

This year has been one of contrast in that the Panel has spent considerable time effectively reviewing a number of Community safety issues and understanding how various agencies inter act with each other and deliver services. However its one attempt to pursue an activity, in the area of car crime failed because of the lack of direction and will to ask for the limited appropriate resources needed to carry it forward.

For the Panel to be more effective in the future it needs to move beyond reviewing to action through detailed scrutiny allowing focused recommendations to the Portfolio Holder and the NFDC's partners to improve the delivery of community safety in the New Forest. There are plans to be more effective but it will require a step change to do this properly. A detailed scrutiny of the NFDC's own contribution through the budget process should figure as an important demonstration of the Panel's intentions to move up a gear into an effective scrutiny body with a positive developmental aim.

Cllr M S Wade

5. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

The year has seen the Panel focussing on wide and varied areas of both interest and concern. I am pleased that CCTV is now installed in New Milton and Hythe but disappointed that technical problems are delaying the installation of the last camera in Hythe.

An important part of the Police and Justice Act 2006 came into force in April 2009. The Panel enthusiastically embraced the need to establish a mechanism to undertake the scrutiny and overview of the local crime and disorder reduction partnership but were very mindful that this new function must add value to the activities of the Partnership and not just add another layer of bureaucracy.

The Panel remains concerned that drugs and alcohol continue to affect the lives of so many people in the New Forest. We also thought it inequitable that funding for treating alcohol dependency in Hampshire was £80,000 in 2008/09 and yet over the same period of time, £3 million was allocated to drugs rehabilitation. This is in spite of the fact that alcohol abuse was much more widespread in the local population and, arguably, causing greater harm.

Finally the Panel has agreed new procedures to improve the effectiveness of reviews and to ensure that each review is subject to proper debate at the outset to establish exactly what questions need to be explored, building in an information evaluation exercise to check the information gathered against the original objectives and to see where additional information needs to be gathered. It is also intended that the revised process will lead to more firm recommendations for suggested courses of action.

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

Cllr Mrs A E McEvoy
Chairman, Crime and Disorder Review Panel



EMPLOYMENT, HEALTH AND WELLBEING REVIEW PANEL - 2009/10

1. ITEMS WHERE AN ISSUE WAS CONSIDERED OR INFORMATION GATHERED

1.1 South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS)

In addition to inviting a member of the Ambulance Service to a Panel meeting to discuss the service in March 2009, the Panel has also been involved in a scrutiny review of the Service.

The Panel was concerned to note that there were downgraded levels of performance for the South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS), which highlighted poor ambulance response times in some rural parts of the District.

The Panel subsequently learned that a review was being undertaken by Buckinghamshire, Hampshire and Oxfordshire County Councils.

In March 2010, the Panel duly received the final report of the Joint County Committee. The review had sought to identify what measures the Ambulance Service had in place to improve performance, particularly in rural areas. The method of reporting meant that information about local variations in response times was now routinely reported or assessed. The authors had requested that the Secretary of State for Health urgently review the situation.

The Panel noted various recommendations in the report, some of which suggested that action should be taken by the end of March 2010, and others within 12 months. The main findings of the review were:

- The current emphasis on the delivery of the national response times was contributing significantly to the creation of a "two-tier" ambulance service that disadvantages people living in rural areas;
- There were relationship management issues within SCAS and with commissioners and some operational shortcomings which contributed to the delivery of this two-tier service;

- Current performance monitoring arrangements took no account of patient outcomes;
- Commissioning was weak and confused.

The Panel was concerned at what was a highly critical report, particularly when only 30% of emergency calls for the Western Downslands met response times.

The Panel felt the review had been very thorough.

The Panel requested that the Head of Public Health and Community Safety write to the members of the Joint County Committee who undertook the review, and also to the Ambulance Service Commissioner passing on this Council's concern regarding the adverse results arising from over-reliance on targets, the lack of focus on quality of care and outcomes, and the resultant extra pressure put on the Out of Hours Service.

The Panel will receive updates at appropriate times on progress towards implementing and completing the recommendations set out in the review, and has asked Cllr Dr Miranda Whitehead to monitor the situation and report back as and when required.

1.2 Tourism

The Panel considered in detail the Council's draft Tourism Strategy Document entitled "Our Future Together II", which closely mirrored the original document, OFTI. The document had been drawn up in consultation with the National Park Authority, with the District Council leading, and input from the Tourism Community Action Network.

Many of the original key principles were still retained, such as the VICE model (of Visitors, Industry, Community and Environment). Tourism in the New Forest was a significant industry and created in the region of 15% of employment, valued at over £500m per year. The Panel agreed that the Tourism Strategy be supported as the basis for negotiations with partners to create an effective Tourism Action Plan.

1.3 Economic Development/Brand New Forest

The Panel received a report on vacancy trends for shop units in town and village centres in the District, in the context of the Council's economic development role.

The Panel expressed support for the related policies in the Core Strategy for encouraging and protecting businesses in the District, town, village, and local centres.

The Panel also asked that representatives from the New Forest Business Partnership be invited to attend the March 2010 Panel meeting to discuss how the Council was helping local businesses in the recession.

The Chairman of the New Forest Business Partnership (NFBP) and the Chairman of New Forest Tourism Association (NFTA) duly attended the March 2010 Panel meeting.

The Panel noted various initiatives and activities being undertaken in partnership with the NFBP and NFTA., including the development of the Brand New Forest campaign, the purpose of which was to foster resilience and encourage loyalty to local businesses.

1.4 'Scores on the Doors'

The Panel has considered a 'Scores on the Doors' scheme for the New Forest District. The scheme is a system for publishing food hygiene premises inspection reports to the public, and features a simple scoring system. The scheme would be cost neutral as it was anticipated that any extra work could be met from within existing resources.

The scheme comprised of an inspection regime which would result in a certificate being put on the door of food premises and other forms of publicity. It was unlikely to become a legal requirement, and would be a voluntary choice for the business concerned.

Currently many authorities have such schemes, but these varied, with a patchwork approach around the country, including some three tier schemes, although the vast majority were 5 tier schemes.

The aims of the proposed scheme were:

- To provide consumers with a user-friendly way to access the information they need to make informed choices about where to eat;
- To encourage food businesses where deficiencies are found to improve their standards of food hygiene leading to safer food;
- To ensure that those food businesses achieving consistently high standards of food hygiene are publicly recognised and rewarded.

It is understood the Scheme will be subject to trade consultations and a revised version will be submitted to Cabinet.

1.5 Flu updates

The Panel received regular updates throughout the year on the expected flu epidemic, and at their March 2010 meeting was pleased to note that the Flu Call Centre had been closed as the incidence of flu had declined. Preventative measures such as vaccines and promotion of personal hygiene measures such as hand washing gels had been a success.

1.6 Equality Standard (Now Equality Framework) Assessment

In receiving an annual report on the Council's external assessment against the Equality Standard, the Panel was pleased to note that the Council had achieved Level 3 of the Standard. The Equality Framework is a tool that local authorities use to ensure they meet their statutory duties and as a benchmark tool to compare their equalities work against that of other authorities.

1.7 Floating Support Service

The Panel has received a report on the role of the new Floating Support Service which currently provides a variety of support to tenants over the age of 55.

The service is funded by Hampshire County Council's Supporting People initiative to enable clients to benefit from the service. The project runs from April 2009 until 31 March 2012 and is to enable delivery of the service for Older People with support needs. The aims of this service are:

- To provide housing related support that enables older people to remain in their homes or assist older people to move into alternative accommodation should they wish to do so.
- To ensure service users' needs, requirements and views are at the forefront of service development and delivery.
- To assist older people to maintain their independence and maximise their health and well-being on a long term basis.

The Panel felt there would be a considerable growth in demand for this service over the coming years and was pleased to note that there were plans to accommodate this from within existing resources. The Panel has called for a further report in March 2011.

1.8 Pest control

The Panel requested and received a presentation on the Council's pest control service. The presentation included legal controls and duties, service provision, examples of premises treated, and charging policies. The Panel agreed that there was a balance to

be struck between controlling pest populations and being realistic about Council budgets. The Council's approach was a reasonable one, the service was free to people on low incomes, and staff had a very difficult and heavy workload.

1.9 Fluoridation

The Panel continues to monitor developments regarding the Strategic Health Authority (SHA) proposals for the fluoridation of water in Southampton and South East Hampshire.

It was noted at the September 2009 Panel meeting that, despite 72% of respondents in the SHA consultation being opposed, the SHA had decided to continue with the fluoridation proposal. The Panel resolved to ask the Head of Public Health and Community Safety and the Employment Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder to write to the SHA reiterating strong concerns about the undemocratic way the issue had been dealt with. At the November meeting it was reported that the issue would be subject to judicial review and there was a possibility that the proposal could be overturned.

2.0 PRESENTATIONS RECEIVED FROM REPRESENTATIVES OF EXTERNAL BODIES

2.1 Out of Hours service

Building on previous work with the Out of Hours Service, the Panel received a further presentation, from the Clinical Services Manager, West Hampshire Out of Hours Service and their Service Development Manager. The presentation covered staff, hours, demographics, the service structure, initiatives and statistics.

2.2 Lymington Hospital

The Panel received an update from the Divisional Director, South Hampshire, Lymington New Forest Hospital, and the Clinical Services Manager, Unscheduled Care.

The presentation included photographs of the various areas of the hospital and details of the outpatient and surgical specialities, the day surgery unit, theatres, imaging suite, wards and minor injuries unit.

The Panel noted that there was unused capacity in some theatres and endoscopy rooms and the hospital was in discussions with the relevant Health Commissioners about the possibility of increasing surgery activities at the hospital.

3.0 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

3.1 Portfolio plans

The Panel considered its Portfolio Plan and Budget Development for 2010/11.

The Panel identified under-performance in one of its key priorities, ie 'Valuing and Supporting Older People'. It was noted this was largely HCC provision and the Community Action Network (CAN) for Older People had not yet been fully constituted. As well as asking the Portfolio Holder to write to the Chairman of the Local Strategic Partnership to emphasise the importance of making progress with this matter, the Panel also plans to use its June 2010 meeting to discuss with key partner organisations ways in which to move forward to help meet this priority.

4.0 OPPOSITION SPOKESPERSON'S COMMENTS

There have been some important issues to debate over the last year and some new initiatives to consider.

Reviewing continually changing Health Service provision is an important part of the

Panel's remit and this year the poor times for emergency rural ambulances were of particular concern. The meticulous work done by Dr Ian Kidson of Fordingbridge must be noted. Without his collation of the figures for rural ambulance times obtained by his Freedom of Information Act requests we would not have proof of the poor service of which the local people have been complaining. The Joint Scrutiny Review Panel's report on rural ambulance times, supported by his figures, was thorough and highly critical. The Joint Review Panel provided recommendations with a short time line for the start of their implementation and we will be following progress closely.

Also there are currently some concerns about the provision of a night time car for the Out of Hours doctors in the Fordingbridge/Avon Valley/Downlands area which we shall continue to monitor.

Fluoridation of the water in Southampton and South East Hampshire was an issue which raised a great deal of interest. It is a debate between public health, which is looking at the greatest good for a population, versus the freedom of the individual to choose not to take a substance which may prevent dental decay. Add into the mixture a lack of dentists and high rates of dental decay in the area and whatever the judgment is it will certainly upset a large group of people.

The flu pandemic appears to have settled and for that we are extremely grateful. One of the happy side effects of the scare stories may be that people are now more likely to wash their hands. We can only hope that is so.

There has been a lot of work done on tourism and economic development over the year and the Brand New Forest initiative was introduced. In the context of a weak economy nationally developments will be watched with interest over the 2010/2011.

I would like to add my personal thanks to Cllr Mrs Rostand for including me in the Chairman's briefings during the year, which I have found both informative and helpful. I look forward to an interesting year's work on the Panel.

Cllr Dr M N Whitehead

5.0 CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

The Panel has done well in continuing to monitor its key Portfolio areas, despite the breadth of its scope. The South Central Ambulance review raised concerns from members, given the highly critical report, and will continue to receive updates. The Panel received regular updates on the Flu situation which thankfully was kept under control. As Tourism is one of the major employers of the District it again featured highly in the year, along with Brand New Forest on our Work Programme. Once again my thanks go to the Members of the Panel and the Officers whose input and hard work makes this such a worthwhile panel.

Cllr Mrs A M Rostand

Chairman, Employment Health and Wellbeing Review Panel



1. MAJOR REVIEWS

1.1 The Council's Green Audit

The Environment Review Panel has now taken over responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the various improvement plans that were developed through the Council's Green Audit. They have agreed that they should receive an update report at every other meeting, with the option to request reports on specific activity areas, as necessary. The reports will also include information on the Council's input into the Hampshire Local Area Agreement work on Climate Change. The Panel is currently looking more closely at the performance achieved on the theme "How we operate our offices".

1.2 Public Conveniences

The Panel appointed a joint member and officer working group to undertake a fundamental review of the Council's stock of public conveniences. This was to inform recommendations to be made to the Portfolio Holder on a number of issues. The Working Group visited a number of the conveniences throughout the District to gain first hand impressions on the various styles of buildings, their practical advantages and disadvantages and the way in which they integrated into the urban or more rural landscapes within which they were placed. This information was put together with a full condition survey for each convenience.

The Panel developed detailed recommendations for each of the existing conveniences. These ranged from minor improvements to the decoration or signage, which could be achieved within the existing planned maintenance budgets, through to complete replacement. The Panel commended the new style modular conveniences, which can be installed within many of the existing buildings fairly easily. The modules are proving much easier and cheaper to maintain, and reducing problems with antisocial

behaviour. Where the existing building is in good condition and fits well in the local landscape there are also considerable savings to be made from using this approach.

The Working Group had asked the Panel to consider recommending the closure of 1 public convenience in Totton, which was the source of many problems and consequently was not well used. In the event the Panel decided that further information should be gathered before the Portfolio Holder could be advised to follow such a course of action.

The Working Group also identified the need for an additional public convenience to serve the public attending the market in Hythe.

The recommendations, which included relative priorities for the work to be carried out, are being included in the expenditure plan proposals for the Environment Portfolio, to be implemented as and when funds allow.

1.3 Abandoned Supermarket Shopping Trolleys

Abandoned supermarket shopping trolleys have been creating a nuisance in several of the town centres in the District and as a consequence consideration was given as to whether this Council should adopt powers within the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (introduced through the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act). These powers allow the trolleys to be seized and a charge levied for their return, or for their destruction. The Panel considered that there was merit in investigating this option and, previous to this year, had instigated the statutory consultation exercise that must be carried out before the powers can be implemented. The Panel considered the responses received to the consultation, and also the practices and charges operating in other areas. As a consequence the Cabinet was advised that these powers should be adopted and a suggested charging structure was also recommended to them. These recommendations were agreed by the Cabinet and the powers adopted.

Since the powers have been adopted there has been a marked improvement in the number of abandoned shopping trolleys in town centres. The first point of contact remains the supermarket themselves, with this Council writing to them, in the first instance, if there are problems with the number of trolleys abandoned in an area. The Council's powers will only need to be used if the supermarket does not respond.

1.4 Cemeteries Regulations

The Panel had undertaken a detailed review of the Cemeteries Regulations during the previous year, in order to resolve some of the practical problems that were being encountered with their management. The lawn cemetery areas were particularly problematic, particularly since, historically, the rules on the goods placed on the grave had not been enforced, leading to established expectations that were contrary to good management practices and needs.

Subsequently, the Council had been contacted by the Gypsy and Traveller communities who were concerned about the practical implication of the revised arrangements. Representatives of the Gypsy community attended a meeting of the Panel to explain their cultural beliefs and needs associated with death and burial. They suggested how they felt they could assist the Council in meeting the management needs of the cemeteries, particularly at Blackfield and Eling, while still being able to meet their cultural traditions. The Panel agreed that there was room for further compromise and requested that there should be further negotiations.

The Panel discussed the revised Regulations, taking account of the views of the Gypsy and Traveller Community, at the meeting in March and have recommended revised Regulations to the Cabinet for adoption. It is hoped that this will meet the needs of all parties.

A further amendment that was included was to allow small modest floral tributes in the Woodland Section, in recognition of the expectations that were allowed to develop over recent years, that floral tributes were acceptable and formed part of the ambience of the area.

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

2.1 Land Drainage and the Pitt Review – the Draft Flood and Water Management Bill

The Government had issued the Draft Flood and Water Management Bill in response to the recommendations of the Pitt Review following the serious flooding in the summer of 2007. This Council's officers, because of their expertise in this field, were engaged in preparing the Local Government Association's response, through the Technical Advisors Group that the LGA had established.

The Panel was briefed on the main proposals, and how these related to the systems that were already in place in this area where information gathering on drainage issues was already well developed and where the emergency planning procedures were already proven to be quite robust in responding to flooding incidents.

The Panel will return to this topic in due course.

2.2 Shoreline Management Plans

The draft Shoreline Management Plans for the North Solent and Poole and Christchurch Bay have both been released for public consultation during the last year. The Panel has kept a watching brief on the preparation stages for each draft Shoreline Management Plan, partly through Member representation on the Member steering groups. The Panel raised concerns about the ability of local ward councillors to assess the proposals and influence the content of the Poole and Christchurch Bay Plan which had a very tight timetable for production. As a result, an opportunity was made for additional Member involvement.

A pragmatic approach has been taken to the published proposals, recognising that some of them will inevitably change in the light of the responses received during the consultation period, particularly with regard to the North Solent plan. The Panel examined each of the draft plans in detail and made comments to the Cabinet. The Cabinet approved each draft plan to go out to consultation, with the Portfolio Holder authorised to agree minor changes to the text as necessary. The consultation period on the draft Poole and Christchurch Bays draft plan has expired, with the consultation on the North Solent Plan ending on 23 April. Once the consultation responses have been analysed and any revisions made, both of the final plans will be considered by the Panel and the Cabinet, leading to their adoption in due course.

2.3 Project Integra

The Panel maintains contacts with Project Integra through both Member and Officer attendance at their meetings. The Member representative has been proactive in feeding information between the two bodies, which the Panel has found to be useful. At the moment the Panel is waiting for the outcome of significant areas of research which is being carried out through Project Integra on, for example, the range of materials that can be handled and sorted through the materials recycling facilities, as this will influence the recommendations that the Panel may make on the materials that are collected from the kerbside.

One area of success, through Project Integra locally, and WRAP nationally, has been the increasing pressure that has been brought to bear on retailers to reduce the amount of

packaging on products. This is one of the factors that has contributed to a reduction in the tonnages of recyclable and residual waste being collected.

Project Integra is in the process of researching options for refuse collection and processing. Significant parts of the Panel's future work depend on the outcome of this research, which has impeded the Panel's activities during the current year (see section 2.4 below)

2.4 Refuse Collection and Recycling

The Refuse Collection and Recycling Working Party has been less active than in previous years as they await the outcome of the research being carried out by Project Integra.

The Working Group visited the food waste composting plant at Hurn airport to start getting a feel for the practicalities of that waste stream being diverted into recycling. They concluded that this course of action would warrant further investigation, in due course. Current information does not demonstrate positive reductions in the carbon footprint of the process and there are a number of other practical difficulties that need to be teased out through the Project Integra research. Nonetheless the Environment Review Panel, acting on this Group's recommendations has not dismissed the topic and will re-evaluate it in due course when further information is available.

One area in which the Working Party has made positive recommendations to the Panel, and thence on to the Portfolio Holder, is on the subject of the benefits of collecting colour separated as opposed to mixed glass collections. Historically there has been a premium paid for colour separated glass. The Working Party evaluated the costs and benefits, some of which were operational, some environmental, through achieving higher levels of credited recycling, while reducing vehicle journeys. The Portfolio Holder has been recommended to change to mixed glass collections and this is in the process of being implemented across the District.

3. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

3.1 Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005

The Panel has established a task and finish working group, with membership drawn from this Panel, Planning and Transportation and Employment Health and Wellbeing, to examine how the various powers under the Clean Neighbourhoods Act are being used and the practical problems involved, particularly in enforcement.

The topic areas that will be the main focus are littering (including litter dropped from cars); dog fouling; fly tipping and the sale of vehicles on the highway. It is planned to report back to the Environment Review Panel in November.

3.2 Test Valley Partnership

The Panel will now be taking on the role of scrutiny and overview for the Environment Service, which was previously carried out through the Test Valley Partnership's Scrutiny Committee. The formal Partnership has now been dissolved. The Panel have received their initial briefing on this area of work and agreed that they will receive 6 monthly "State of the Nation" reports from the Head of Service, to allow them to monitor performance. They will also receive ad hoc reports, as and when necessary, to address particular issues as they come forwards.

3.3 Portfolio and Performance Plan

This was the second year in which the Panel had considered performance under the Environment Portfolio within the context of the Portfolio Plan. In addition, this information was also used to inform the debate on the proposed fees and charges

within the Portfolio for 2010/11. No changes were recommended for the fees and charges, but the Panel did recommend one change to the proposed budget, preferring to reduce expenditure through promoting the prevention of litter using a publicity campaign, rather than investing in additional cleaning equipment specifically for chewing gum.

The Panel find the Portfolio Planning process provides a more coherent approach to monitoring performance and trends. They welcomed the finding that overall performance across all areas was either improved or stayed the same.

4. OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN'S COMMENTS

Results of the panel's work this year have been characterised by a mixture of positive outcomes and some disappointments. Particular successes have been seen in the areas of public conveniences, management of errant supermarket trolleys, cemeteries and litter clearance at local markets.

Several public conveniences have been replaced or heavily refurbished across the District and are designed to be more airy and congenial as well as being better proofed against anti-social damage (see 1.2 above). However, provision of toilets can be patchy and the current programme of improvement and rebuilding has come to an end. In the context of the Clean Neighbourhoods Act, the District has developed a new policy in consultation with retailers to deal with abandoned supermarket trolleys, with fees/fines of up to £50 for each case. NFDC has also taken over responsibility for clearing up after the street markets in Lymington and Ringwood. This means that the refuse collected can be recycled or used as fuel for energy production in the same way as domestic waste.

A chronic problem relating to cemeteries has also been resolved. There has been a significant Roma population in the New Forest for centuries, and their culture demands that graves are heavily decorated with the deceased's possessions and mementoes. Since most cemeteries are kept as 'garden cemeteries' to facilitate maintenance, Roma-style graves cannot be allowed. However negotiations between the parties have resulted in special areas being reserved for those with special cultural or religious requirements.

The Council's Green Audit continues with the development of strategies to mitigate the impact of possible climate change on the District in the near and more distant future. Reduction of carbon emissions goes hand in hand with renewable energy projects designed to reduce dependence on fossil fuels. It is intended that strategies to reduce carbon emissions will be 'cascaded down' to local communities and businesses to ensure their sustainability in the long term. Although the Council signed the Nottingham Agreement on sustainability in 2009, it was disappointing that members did not agree to sign up to the national 10:10 campaign aiming to reduce corporate and personal emissions by 10%.

Possible climate change and sea level rises would have a particular impact in the District, with threats of lowland flooding and cliff erosion. As a result the North Solent Shoreline Management Plan has been established. An expert group of NFDC officers is working with the University of Southampton Institute of Oceanography to predict likely future scenarios along our coastline. From Lymington to Hurst Spit, the policy will be to 'hold the line', but the future is less assured for the cliffs from Milford up to the Dorset border, especially at Barton-on-Sea where in a worst case scenario hundreds of homes could be lost up to 2100 as the cliffs slip.

Developments on the refuse collection and recycling front have been somewhat disappointing. Project Integra, the Hampshire County Council body with overarching responsibility for recycling, has not yet made a firm commitment to broadening the range of recyclable materials that are collected. Some authorities, such as Eastleigh and

East Dorset, have experimented with innovative schemes such as the collection of kitchen waste and the collection from the kerbside of spent batteries and glass bottles and jars. Kitchen waste has potential in the future for the production of methane gas through anaerobic digestion, especially as localised or home-based energy production becomes commonplace. The District's waste collection strategies appear most definitely to be 'bottom line controlled' rather than proactive. The recycling of a wider range of plastics is not yet on the horizon and there is a reluctance to add aluminium based food trays and foil, in spite of the inherent value of the metal. The kerbside collection of glass is not an immediate NFDC target, as statistics purport to suggest that 80% of bottles used by consumers are already deposited at local bottle banks. In this area, the District follows rather than leads.

The Clean Neighbourhoods Act is also implemented as a 'light touch' strategy by the District. In spite of only 2% of areas being identified as 'below standard' from the cleanliness point of view, there is no doubt that litter thrown from vehicles is an ongoing problem. It is rare to see the verge of a major road clear of cans, bottles, snack packets and fast food containers and wrappings. Minor through routes and rat runs are similarly affected. Some council officers have been trained to impose fines on those who throw litter from vehicles, but the act is poorly structured: the offender must be specifically identified if a penalty is to be imposed. It is therefore easy to explain why since April 1st 2007 only 13 fines have been imposed for littering the highway and one on a dog owner for failing to pick up and bin dog mess. The District needs to lobby the government to modify the provisions of the act in order to make policing of littering offences more straightforward.

Cllr P E Hickman

5. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

This has been a very busy year with some excellent results. However there is a good deal of work still in progress and with new challenges, especially budgetary limitations, I anticipate more of the same in the year ahead.

The Panel will continue to support the retention of weekly refuse and recycling collections this being one of our 'flagship' services.

I thank all the members of the Panel for their high level of attendance at all meetings and subsequent invaluable work resulting in thorough reviews, all conducted with a great team spirit.

On behalf of the Panel members I also thank the Officers and other staff who have been unfailingly helpful and patient in providing background information.

Cllr Ms L C Ford

Chairman, Environment Review Panel



HOUSING REVIEW PANEL - 2009/10

1. MAJOR REVIEWS

1.1 Review of Sheltered Accommodation

The Panel reviewed of sheltered accommodation and the implementation of a new 'older persons' service. The review focused on examining 529 units of sheltered accommodation spread between 20 sheltered housing schemes and proposals for rationalisation of this sheltered housing stock. The Panel, with officers, determined that any re-categorisation process should be undertaken over a 12 month period in order to ensure that tenants affected by any changes were given ample time to discuss options with officers. Panel members stressed the importance of continuing a high level of communication with tenants and local ward members. The Panel's views have been taken on board by the Portfolio Holder and the Head of Housing. The Panel has received regular updates on progress on decommissioning individual schemes and those tenants affected, and will continue this monitoring process.

1.2 Disabled Facilities Grant Waiting List

The Panel continues to monitor the Disabled Facilities Grant waiting list and has held discussions with the Housing Technical Manager twice in the current municipal year. The Panel wishes to ensure that the current team is properly supported to enable them to reduce the waiting time for applicants. The Housing Technical Team had been understaffed for some time which had had a detrimental effect on managing the increasing waiting list time. The extreme difficulties in recruiting to fill two vacant posts in the team were overcome in July 2009, when all vacant posts were finally successfully filled. Since that time the waiting list has reduced significantly. The Panel will keep a watching brief on this issue.

1.3 Management of Housing Assets – Voids

In light of the increasing financial pressures being placed on the Housing budget the Panel investigated the management of housing assets, in particular the cost of long term voids. The Panel had concerns regarding the rising cost of repairs to void properties and suggested various options to tackle this. As the Housing Service had insufficient resource to undertake inspections of properties, the Council had limited knowledge of their condition. The Panel therefore recommended to Executive Management Team (EMT) that a new post should be created in order to manage property inspections and help avoid high repair costs to damaged and poorly maintained properties. EMT agreed the appointment of a Property Inspection Assistant and this post was filled in February 2010. The Panel has also supported an amendment to the tenancy agreement to new tenants to stress the importance of properly maintaining properties. The Panel will monitor the progress of the new post holder to ensure that value for money is being achieved.

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

2.1 Housing Building Project

In the autumn of 2009 the Government announced their intention to encourage the development of housing, in particular affordable housing. This included the Kick Start programme of £400 million to unlock stalled sites, and provided local authorities with the opportunity to bid for this grant.

In January the Panel had the pleasure of congratulating the Housing Strategy and Development Manager on the success of the Council's bid for funding of £650,000 from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The success of the bid means that the Council will be able to commence building ten new affordable family houses in 2010/2011.

2.2 Reform of Local Authority Housing Finance

The Government in July 2009 issued a consultation paper on the reform of council housing finance. The Panel considered a suggested response to the questions posed by the Government within the paper. The Panel agreed that the reform of council housing finance was long overdue and they were supportive of the principle of changing the current format of the housing revenue account for a fairer system. However they were disappointed at the lack of detail in the consultation paper which meant that the Council was not able to comment fully. Until the situation with the notional national housing debt is resolved it is difficult to ascertain clearly what the impact might be on New Forest District Council. After submitting their response, through the Portfolio Holder, the Panel is still awaiting further clarification from the Government on the details of the proposals.

3. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

3.1 Housing 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 the difficulties in providing affordable housing and reducing the housing waiting list, both of which have been exacerbated by the recession.

3.2 Housing Portfolio Plan/Finance and Expenditure

The Panel considered the housing portfolio plan. The Panel were pleased to be able to recommend to the Cabinet that £50k from the housing social grant be allocated to

fund the housing building programme. The Panel joined the Portfolio Holder in congratulating the Head of Housing and Housing officers for their continued hard work in light of the increasing financial constraints being placed on the Service. As in previous years, the Panel continues to have concerns regarding the future stability of the Housing Revenue Account.

3.3 Lead Scrutiny Member Activities

The Lead Scrutiny Members have met with the Service Head on one occasion this year. Limited further contact has taken place, indicating that the Service Head has had limited challenge or monitoring from Lead Members during this cycle. The future activities of Lead Members will need to be addressed as Lead Scrutiny Members could be said to be providing limited challenge in the current process. This could be largely due to the high level of trust placed in the ability of the Service Head and the current perception regarding the performance of the service.

3.4 Tenant Involvement

This year the Panel has seen a change in its tenant representatives. More tenants have been present at Panel meetings, and this has enabled increased participation and fresh outlook from the tenants. The Panel values the views of tenants on how the Council is delivering its services as this helps the Panel keep abreast of the changing needs and demands of its primary customers. Changes are taking place at a national level regarding the access of tenants to the democratic process through the new Tenants Services Authority. The Panel will consider these changes later on in the year but in the meantime continue actively to involve and encourage tenant participation at Panel meetings.

4. PANEL PRESENTATIONS

4.1 The Panel continues to invite expert witnesses to Panel meetings to better inform members on items under consideration. This has been largely successful, and the presentations have generated some debate. Whether specific actions for improvements have been raised as a result of these presentations is a matter which could be explored as part of the wider scrutiny review.

4.2 Presentations have included inviting representatives from building services, Tunstall Monitoring and Kingfisher Homes. 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. Members also feel that there is a greater role for the Panel in reviewing key housing partners; ensuring that future partnerships are progressing well and are providing residents and the Council with value for money.

5. WORK PROGRAMME

5.1 Workshop

The Panel held their annual work programme workshop in the summer. Officers assisted members in drawing up a list of relevant topic areas which required investigation by the Panel. The Panel added to their programme throughout the year in response to changes in legislation, Government initiatives and requests arising from members' general interest.

6. OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN'S COMMENTS

I am glad to see that the Portfolio Holder and Chairman of the Panel plus ward members are visiting the sheltered schemes. I feel we should be doing more to communicate effectively with tenants to alleviate many fears that have been

generated. In my own ward tenants were not adequately notified of plans which caused concern. I'm confident that communication in this area will improve.

I welcome the reduction in the waiting times and I rejoice in the fact that the staff vacancies have now been filled. I do have concerns regarding the impact that the current staff re-structure will have on the waiting list time.

I am very pleased that void properties will be re-let within 21 days and hopefully the Council will work hard to recover any monies lost through damage caused by outgoing tenants. I welcome the new Property Inspection post.

Tenant participation is very strong and I hope this remains as there are worthwhile benefits to obtaining their views and comments. There is a good variety of subjects discussed in the tenant focus groups and they are well attended.

I believe that this past year has seen many positive changes. However the Service should strive for continuous improvements. Hopefully this will be achieved in the coming year.

Cllr Mrs M McLean

7. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

The Housing Review Panel continues to work hard. This year we have been monitoring three major areas:- management of our housing assets and voids; sheltered housing and the disabled facilities grant waiting list.

The Panel has invited officers and external partners to the Panel to provide presentations to assist members' understanding of Housing Service provision. This helps to shape the services delivered, to ensure that they are meeting the needs and expectations of our service users while at the same time providing value for money.

The Panel continues to consult with tenants and is pleased that the number of tenant representatives on the Review Panel has grown; and with the success of our tenant focus groups.

The highlight of the year has to be the success of the Housing Building Programme. Building our own houses ensures that we retain our assets whilst importantly providing high quality homes for people within the district. I look forward to seeing them built and would like to thank Diana MacLean, Housing Strategy and Development Manager, for her work in helping to achieve this.

I would also like to thank the Head of Housing and other officers for continuing to maintain excellent standards during this period of economic uncertainty.

Cllr Mrs A J Hoare

Chairman, Housing Review Panel



LEISURE, CULTURE AND YOUTH MATTERS REVIEW PANEL - 2009/10

1. MAJOR REVIEWS

1.1 Access to Services by Vulnerable Children and Young People

The Panel hosted a discussion with guests from the Children and Young People's sector to discuss the accessibility of leisure services for young people. The session produced a healthy debate on how well the needs of young people, particularly those with special needs are known and how effective communication was in understanding the needs and demands of this client group. The Panel felt that the Council could play a greater role in facilitating dialogue between clubs and young people to ensure that clubs were meeting the varying needs of young people. Members agreed that the Council has a greater role to play in ensuring that young people are able to actively influence services and recommended that more innovative ways of communication, such as texts, the youth website and social networking sites, should be explored. 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 will also review this issue when considering sports development and health and leisure centre plans in the near future.

1.2 Assessment of Club 816 and Gym 816

The Panel undertook an assessment of the 816 Clubs and Gyms. The Panel had the pleasure of listening to two young people who were both users and members of the 816 Club and Gym at Ringwood Health and Leisure Centre. The views of the two users helped the Panel understand what initially attracted them to the scheme, the participation levels of their peers and how this could be increased. Members were pleased to hear that the officers were actively undertaking outreach work within local schools to promote the benefits of the 816 scheme. However it was agreed that greater promotional work, especially through local clubs, could be undertaken to

attract new users. The Panel were generally happy with the success of the 816 Clubs and Gyms in combating childhood obesity, but felt that the Council could do more to increase the participation of inactive young people. The Panel identified various recommendations in that vein which were put forward to the appropriate officers and the Portfolio Holder for action.

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

2.1 The Role and Impact of the Key Arts and Heritage Partners Funded by the Council

The Panel explored with guests from Arts and Heritage partners the ways in which existing arts and heritage partnerships could be strengthened. All partner organisations offered outreach programmes to engage with specific sections of the community to address particular social issues or needs. The programmes offered provided benefits to the target group such as offering fun ways to educate children and young people, creating opportunities for community cohesion, helping disadvantaged groups and encouraging rehabilitation.

The Panel heard that participation in creative activity had proved successful in rehabilitating members of the community. Outreach programmes not only benefited the targeted group but also raised the profile of the organisation and, by increasing the number of potential users, had a positive impact on the local economy. The Panel felt that the Council should continue, where possible, to support these local organisations.

The findings of the session were put forward to the Portfolio Holder for consideration. It was also agreed that each of the key partners be invited to Panel meetings, on a rotational basis, to give a presentation to members on their activities and use of funding. The Panel has already received a presentation from ArtSway, when members considered the activities at the gallery and future funding options.

3. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

3.1 Limited activity has taken place between the Panel's Lead Scrutiny Members and the Head of Leisure and the Head of Communities and Employment in monitoring the progress of the Service. Lead Member activity within the current arrangements was highlighted as an issue for consideration under the scrutiny review (see paragraph 4.2 below).

3.2 Portfolio Holder Plan and Budget

The Panel discussed the progress of the Service budget and were pleased with the success of the 'free swim' initiative. The Panel was happy with the new style and format of the Portfolio Plan but felt that the summary of the financial information in the budget development section of the Plan was inadequate. This had a negative impact on the Panel's ability effectively to scrutinise this area prior to the budgets adoption. The Panel requested that in future they receive completed financial information prior to the November Panel meetings so that the Panel had adequate opportunity to influence the budget. The Executive Director (Section 151 Officer) and the Finance and Efficiency Portfolio Holder were informed of this request.

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 visited various Arts and Heritage partners across the district. The purpose was to increase members' understanding of services provided and the Council's involvement with these partners. The information gathered was used to assist debate at the September meeting, where members discussed how partnership with these organisations could be improved.

4.2 Workshop

The Panel holds a workshop annually to set items for its work programme. This year a different approach was undertaken. This was largely due to the fact that the date of the workshop fell at the commencement of the review of the scrutiny arrangements. The workshop instead concentrated on providing initial thoughts on how the scrutiny system was currently working from the viewpoint of a scrutiny panel. The Panel's workshop was primarily focused on determining how, in practice, the Panel had worked; what it had achieved through Panel meetings; and where improvements could be made. The Panel identified positive elements to the current arrangements such as the freedom to set their own work programmes and holding member-led discussion. However members found that there was a general lack of understanding of 'scrutiny', the Council's finances and the powers available to scrutiny members under the Council's Constitution. They felt that the system was not being used to its best advantage. The Panel put forward various suggestions for improvements, such as a more transparent relationship with the Executive. The views of the Panel have been passed on to the independent consultant undertaking the review.

5. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

I am very pleased with the work the Panel has undertaken this year. The Panel continues to be proactive in seeking to obtain the views and concerns of users and partners which helps to ensure that Leisure Services are not only cost-effective but meet the changing demands of our users.

The Panel had the opportunity to utilise its work programme workshop to discuss not only the successes of the Panel's work but also areas for improvement. I am glad that the Panel's comments will go some way to assisting the Council's scrutiny review.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all members of the Panel for their efforts and co-operation and similarly all officers concerned, for their input during the past municipal year.

Cllr J A G Hutchins

Chairman, Leisure, Culture & Youth Matters Review Panel



1. MAJOR REVIEWS

1.1 Core Strategy / Core Strategy Examination / Sites and Development Management Development Plan Document

The Panel has monitored progress with the Core Strategy progression through public examination to adoption and its future implications. Members were informed that the Core Strategy examination hearings process went well, but had been very challenging for the Policy and Plans team. The Panel received updates on the various related issues. The Inspector's Report had been received and is now a public document. The Inspector found the Council's Core Strategy to be "sound", and the Panel received a summary of the main points.

An informal meeting of the Panel took place in September 2009, to which all Members of the Council were invited. This featured a full presentation on the content of the Inspector's report and its implications. A report was then made to the Cabinet and the Council, recommending adoption of the Core Strategy. It has now become the key part of the statutory Development Plan. The process is being taken forward with a "Site and Development Management Development Plan Document" which will be a detailed document, taking a year to prepare. This will then be published in draft for consultation before being submitted for formal examination. This document will provide the detail to supplement the policies in the Core Strategy and also draw lines on maps. It will replace the remaining saved local plan policies. The Development Plan Document process requires that all proposals must be soundly researched and based on evidence.

The Panel was advised of the draft programme for the production of the Development Plan document. The Panel has also been consulted on the content of the Document. Given the size of the task, a small Members' Advisory Group has been established to agree how best to produce the document and consult with members.

1.2 Local Distinctiveness

The Panel has at each meeting monitored and contributed to the progress of the New Milton Local Distinctiveness Supplementary Planning Document.

The Panel received the Local Distinctiveness outline document in May 2009. The programme will be delivered over the next few years, with New Milton and then Lymington being the first towns in the process. This will result in the production of a series of Local Distinctiveness Supplementary Planning Documents, for which New Milton is the pilot. The documents will be fundamental to how planning applications in New Milton will be treated in future and should help improve the position of the Council in ensuring that this and other towns later in the process retain their character.

As part of the process, in July 2009 a session was held in New Milton to help the community express their views about their town. The workshop was very useful and a great deal had been learned from the process. The Local Distinctiveness Supplementary Planning Document subsequently produced was the result of the collective work of the planning service, in terms of design, policy and development control.

Local District Councillors, together with representatives from the Town Council, were invited to the November 2009 Panel meeting to consider the New Milton work. The Town Council's representatives were generally happy with the content of the document, and hoped that the final version would help minimise decisions being lost on appeal and retain the character of New Milton.

The Panel recommended to the Portfolio Holder that formal approval be given to go to public consultation. This ran from 18 January-1 March 2010. The Panel received details of responses from consultees and forwarded to Cabinet for agreement.

While there could be no guarantee about any decisions that may be taken by the Planning Inspectorate, the Panel concluded that the Document was a useful tool in supporting the Council's aims and objectives, and in a more robust manner. The Panel was reassured that the Supplementary Planning Document had the potential to deliver the planning objectives for which it had been developed. They congratulated the officers on the quality and content of the document. A preparatory meeting for the local distinctiveness study of Lymington has also been held and work will now progress on the draft Lymington SPD.

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

2.1 Annual Monitoring Report

The Panel received a summary of the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) for 2009. The AMR was a statutory requirement and looked at the Council's performance relating to the New Forest District Local Plan and the Local Development Framework.

The Panel was pleased to note that, in general terms, the Council was performing very well in progressing the Local Development Framework. The Core Strategy had been adopted in October 2009 and work had started on the Sites and Development Management Development Plan Document. Few other authorities nationally were as well advanced. The Panel was advised of performance against plan targets for housing provision; employment and the economy; transport and access; the natural environment; the built environment and community facilities.

2.2 Development Control – Changes to Development Management

The Panel considered the principles of Development Management and whether this approach should be adopted at New Forest District Council. Rather than just being a new name for Development Control, Development Management was an integral part

of the overall spatial planning process that sought to achieve better development and community benefits from development than the present system. If implemented, the new arrangements would represent a substantive change in culture and approach. Development Management was a Government initiative, but had been championed by the Planning Officers' Society. It involves taking a wider approach view when considering planning

applications than just a "tick box" approach to compliance with planning policy, and requires consideration of how the aims and objectives of the Core Strategy can best be achieved. There would be more work with partner agencies. Development Control teams were being re-organised to reflect the new arrangements, including some redeployments.

2.3 Finance/Enforcement/Development Control

Members were informed at the June 2009 meeting that 6.5 posts had been deleted from the Development Control and Building Control sections (7.5 including one secondment to Enforcement). A total of £200,000 per annum had been saved and the changes had been implemented. Also, a further £70,000 had been saved from non-staff items (publicity and consultants). An additional £100,000 income had been generated. Given the above measures, the Head of Planning and Transportation felt that Planning had responded to the situation, though this was not the end of the process. The staff had been reduced to reflect the workload decline. The new team structure involved two teams for Major Planning Applications and Appeals, and Minor Applications and Enforcement. This meant that the East and West Teams no longer existed. A member of staff had been redeployed to Enforcement to ensure a continued emphasis on that Service in line with members' wishes. The Panel accepted the changes.

2.4 Fees and Charges for the Planning Service from 1 April 2010

The Panel was consulted on the proposed fees and charges for the planning service. Some of the fees were set by Government, with no local discretion, but where this Authority had discretion the Panel supported holding all fees and charges at the same level as 2009/2010 in order to assist local people and businesses in the current challenging financial climate.

The Panel shared the Portfolio Holder's hope that income levels would improve through increased volumes of transactions during the coming year, once the economy showed signs of recovery.

2.5 Car Parking Charges

The Portfolio Holder expressed his intention to consult the Panel routinely about proposals for charges within the Council's pay and display car parks. The Panel supported the Portfolio Holder's proposal that there should be no increase in charges, either through the pay and display meters or for the parking clocks. It was noted that the hourly differential varied illogically in some car parks but the Panel felt that it was not appropriate to rationalise the charging structure at this time, but rather to review these when prices were being adjusted in the future.

2.6 Concessionary Fares for Young People

The Panel considered a detailed evaluation of options for providing concessionary fares for young people to assist them to access jobs and services. In December 2009 the Panel had previously indicated that the scheme should be kept within budget.

The scheme had been introduced originally on a very targeted basis to help young people in specific geographical areas. Since then the scheme had become very well

known and had been taken up by many young people across the District. The Panel did not feel that it was a good use of resources to try to introduce, for young people, an equivalent subsidy to that available to elderly residents under the national concessionary travel entitlements. In addition, responsibility for the concessionary travel scheme was being transferred to the County Council with effect from 1 April 2011, and consideration must be given as to whether the young persons' subsidy should also revert to being a County Council function.

The Panel supported the use of a more targeted approach, with application forms no longer being freely available on the Council's website, but obtained through organisations such as the Youth Service and Connexions. The Council's web site would be annotated to let young people know where they could access the forms.

The Panel did not favour the introduction of means testing criteria, if this could be avoided. Middle income families often struggled as much as those on benefits and those young people should not be excluded. The Panel recommended that if these revised arrangements did not bring the scheme within budget by 31 August 2010, then the value of the concession should be reduced from £40 to £30 a year from 1 October 2010. The Panel felt the scheme should be reviewed again in the Autumn 2010, in the light of the transfer of responsibility for concessionary travel in general to the County Council with effect from April 2011.

2.7 Cycle Routes Provision

The Panel has considered the provision of cycle routes in the District but outside the National Park. The Panel noted progress being made in relation to preparing cycle networks for the main settlements in the District outside the National Park, and commented on emerging suggested cycle route proposals. Members were reminded that the consultation process would involve local members and this would be their opportunity for detailed input.

2.8 A31 Ringwood

The Panel has, since November 2008, monitored action on a Notice of Motion for a 50 mph speed limit along on the A31 at Ringwood. The Panel recommended to Cabinet that the Highways Agency (HA) be urged to bring forward a range of safety measures, 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.

At their March 2010 meeting, the Panel received a detailed progress update following a recent meeting between NFDC and HA officers. The Panel were pleased to note that the HA would soon be making a decision on whether to undertake a scheme of major improvements to the A31 to reduce congestion on the west bound carriageway. Vehicle actuated signs would be installed within 2 months on the westbound A31 carriageway to warn drivers who are approaching potential queues too quickly. The HA maintain that a 50 mph would not address the road safety concerns, but are supportive of a study into the possible use of an average speed enforcement system and the conclusions of a study involving part of the A31 in the Ringwood area would be known within the next few months.

2.9 Vacancies and Commercial Uses in Shopping Frontages

The Panel has considered on three occasions vacancy trends for shop units in main town and village centres in the District. The recession appears to have resulted in an increase in vacancies in almost all of the centres, with the exception of Hythe. There are overall increases in vacancy levels, and there is a clear upward trend since 2004 in terms of increased vacancies in the main town/village centres and in the percentage of vacant frontage in primary shopping areas.

2.10 Review of Charity Shops Trading

After discussion of this issue by the Panel, the Council wrote to 43 charity shops asking them to verify that they were trading correctly, and that their goods were wholly or mainly donated. The Panel was subsequently advised that all 43 charity shops in the District had responded. From the information provided, all the charity shops complied with the current rules that allowed them to qualify for the mandatory 80% discount on non-domestic rates. As a matter of policy, this Council did not allow any additional, discretionary, non domestic rate relief.

The Panel was of the view that, while the charity shops were complying with existing rules, they were able to generate unfair competition for small businesses on the high street. It was noted that this Council had, in the past, tried to raise the issue of the rules that allowed charity shops to sell a relatively high proportion of new goods in competition with ordinary retailers. It was agreed at the January 2010 Panel meeting that the position in the other local authorities in Hampshire should also be investigated, and that their support be sought on this issue. Subject to this support being forthcoming, the Panel has asked that, in turn, the Local Government Association's support be sought in raising with Government the unfairness caused to ordinary retailers by the current rules. It is hoped that a response will come to the June 2010 Panel meeting.

2.11 Southampton Port Master Plan Response

The Panel considered the Council's response to the Southampton Port Master Plan and submitted recommendations to the Portfolio Holder.

2.12 Draft National Policy Statement on Ports

The Panel has considered that the National Policy Statement on Ports which would set the context within which any proposals for port development would be considered. The Cabinet took account of the Panel's recommendations in formulating a response. There were some serious concerns about some elements of the Statement.

Overall, it was considered that this draft Policy Statement did not provide a sound basis for considering port proposals within a proper wider context (a view since endorsed by the House of Commons Transport Select Committee).

2.13 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

The Panel has considered details of the CIL, a Government initiative which local authorities can choose to introduce to fund infrastructure in their areas, including roads, public transport, open space or health centres. This levy would replace many developers' contributions collected under Section 106 Agreements, but could also be invoked on smaller projects than was previously possible. Currently only 14% of planning applications attracted developers' contributions. If the Council chose not to adopt the CIL system, it would be limited in its ability to collect public open space or transportation related payments after 2014. Given the uncertainty of the imminent General Election, it was felt prudent (given the work involved to effect the change) to defer any decisions on this matter and await a further report in September, when the position should be more clear.

3. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

3.1 Planning and Transportation Portfolio Plan : Budget Development 2010/11

The Committee considered the Portfolio Plan for 2010/11. The Looking Back 2008/09 document for the Planning and Transportation Portfolio was noted, whilst highlighting concerns about the over simplification of the points system. The Panel endorsed the Portfolio Plan 2010/11, subject to changes outlined by the Portfolio Holder in the savings section, relating to car parking charges.

4. OTHER ITEMS

- Corporate Consultations – Including Citizens’ Panel and Young People’s Panel;
- Results from the Citizens’ Panel and Young People’s Panel Questionnaires on “Transport”;
- Regional Spatial Strategy.

5. CHAIRMAN’S COMMENTS

Planning and Transportation have achieved a number of notable successes this year. We were one of the first Councils in England to have its Local Development Framework declared ‘sound’ following its examination in public. This is testimony to the professionalism of the officers involved. We have now moved on to start looking at Local Distinctiveness which will form the future basis for deciding planning applications. These documents, once adopted, should allow us to lessen the likelihood of unacceptable developments taking place in our towns. Finally, the Government Ports Policy Paper caused us some concern in that it appeared to negate the impact of developments on the environment and thereby open the door for a future Dibden Bay application. Legal advice was sought and a submission made to the Transport Select Committee that European Designations (such as Dibden Bay) could not be circumvented. This is a key principle and brings with it the need for any application to consider alternative sites and compensation measures. The Select Committee in its report have agreed with the New Forest District Council position on this point.

Cllr F P Vickers

Chairman, Planning and Transportation Review Panel