

# Review Panel Annual Report

2010/11





**1. OVERVIEW**

A key theme for a number of Panels, this last year, has been the need to assist in the preparation of the Council's response to various Government consultations that have come forwards following the establishment of the Coalition Government. The Housing Panel, in particular, has had a number of such consultations which have required careful consideration, while the Crime and Disorder Review Panel has also had to consider a number of proposals on policing and community safety.

Another noticeable area of work this year has been the Panels' role in the various consultation exercises that have been carried out by the Council. The Panels have been pro-active in ensuring that there has been adequate consultation and the responses received have been duly considered. In general terms the Panels continue to provide one of the more active interfaces between the Council and partner organisations. The Panels' role remains one of discussion and influence. This makes the outcomes of their work difficult to quantify, which remains a source of concern to many bank bench councillors.

This year three of the Panels have evaluated the main reviews that they have undertaken over the last 4 years and formed a view on the degree to which the review process has added value to outcomes. The Panels have each found that process extremely useful and is consequently one which I would ask all the Panels to consider for the future.

**2. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLANNING**

The Portfolio Plans have continued to provide a coherent structure through which the Panels can monitor performance against the indicators set for the previous year; consider the priorities for the coming year and consequently the allocation of resources. This year, following the initial stages of the evaluation of performance, attention had to be focussed on the need to achieve significant savings through the medium term financial plan. All of the Panels had the opportunity to comment on future priorities and the proposals to secure savings. In the event, subject to comments on details, the Panels unanimously concluded that the proposals were sensible and soundly based. The Panels will continue to take part in the reviews of budget priorities as they come forwards.

**3. CALL INS**

There has been one call in during the last year, with the Leisure Culture and Youth Matters Panel calling in the Portfolio Holder's decision to reintroduce charges for under 17 year olds and over 60's for swimming, after the Government withdrew the funding for the free scheme at short notice. The Panel confirmed the Portfolio Holder's decision.

**4. NOTICES OF MOTION**

There have been no Notices of Motion referred to the Panels during the last year.

**5. SCRUTINY REVIEW**

As reported to you last year, the Corporate Overview Panel initiated a fundamental review of the scrutiny process at New Forest. Over last summer, South East Employers Organisation conducted extensive research into our current procedures and perceptions, and produced a report on options for change and improvement. It was initially decided not to progress the recommendations because of the then impending publication of the Localism Bill but since the contents and timing of the Bill became known, the South East Employer's report has been recommended. Corporate Overview Panel has supported a recommendation that the number of review panels should be reduced to 3. The decision on whether to adopt those recommendations will be made by the Council at today's meeting.

**Cllr J G Ward**  
Chairman, Corporate Overview Panel



# CORPORATE OVERVIEW PANEL - 2010/11

## 1. MAJOR REVIEWS

### 1.1 Review of Scrutiny Arrangements

Since January 2010, the Panel has been overseeing a review of the Council's scrutiny arrangements. Recommendations for a new scrutiny structure have been submitted to the Cabinet and appear elsewhere on the agenda at the full Council meeting on 18 April.

In January 2010, the Panel appointed a Working Group to undertake the review. The Group subsequently agreed to commission Mark Palmer of South East Employers to conduct the review, which took place over April/May 2010. During the course of the review over half of the Council's members responded to a questionnaire, Mr Palmer interviewed 22 members and facilitated 3 member/officer focus groups. All members had the opportunity to take part and comment.

Mr Palmer presented his report to the Panel in June 2010, when all members were invited to attend. The Panel agreed with the proposals but deferred submitting recommendations to the Cabinet and the Council pending publication of the Localism Bill which had been expected to allow Councils to revert to the Committee system.

The Localism Bill was published in December 2010, and indeed provided for Councils to revert to a Committee system, but that any such change could take effect only at an ordinary election of councillors. This meant that the Council could not make changes until May 2015 at the earliest. Given this, the Panel at their last meeting made recommendations to Council on a new scrutiny structure based on South East Employers' recommendations. The proposed new structure comprises 3 panels. An important part of the new arrangements will be the emphasis on task and finish groups, which it is hoped will be a key component of members' future involvement in scrutiny.

An informal Chairmen's and Vice-Chairmen's Group is also recommended to oversee the implementation of the remainder of SEE's recommendations. The remit of this group would include coordination and approval of the annual work programmes of

the panels, monitoring the outputs and effectiveness of the Panels and task groups, reporting annually on the Panels to the full Council, and recommending member development programmes for overview and scrutiny. The Panel sees the success of the new arrangements depending to a large extent on embracing of new ways of working, fostering a new culture and more collaborative relationships with the Cabinet.

It is hoped these measures will result in a more productive, incisive and valued scrutiny resource across the whole of the Council.

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

### **2.1 Office Optimisation Project**

The Panel received a presentation on the Optimisation Project.

The purpose of the project was to make more efficient use of the Council's office accommodation by removing excess capacity, creating 'Flexible Work – Style' spaces, and pursuing opportunities for sharing office space, thus reducing operating costs, and gaining a number of other improvements. The overall end objective was to secure best value for New Forest residents.

Consideration had been given to achieving a single site solution, with Appletree Court being the preferred option, by means of an extension to Appletree Court. Given various factors (in particular, lower risk and complexity) it was in the end decided to pursue the option of moving a number of NFDC employees from Lymington Town Hall to rationalise space at Appletree Court, and sharing the vacated accommodation at Lymington Town Hall with the National Park Authority (NPA). Whilst some concerns were expressed about the timescale for the project, the Panel was satisfied that, based on the information it had received, the recommended option appeared to offer the best solution for the Council in terms of cost effectiveness, risk management and overall organisational benefits.

### **2.2 Outside Bodies – Update**

The Panel received an update on Outside Body membership following the Panel's review of this topic and related recommendations to the Cabinet in 2008. The review had been conducted by Cllr Mrs Robinson, Cllr Hutchins and Cllr Pemberton, with assistance from officers in Democratic Services.

Whilst the Panel was generally satisfied with the outcome of the review, some Members were disappointed to note that only 18 reports on outside bodies had been received from members serving as Council representatives and requested that a reminder be issued to members. Reports would help to identify whether continued representation was warranted.

### **2.3 Treatment of Information Reports**

The Panel agreed that it did not wish to receive many of the reports traditionally submitted to them for information via agendas for meetings. It was felt that these should be circulated in other ways, in order to streamline agendas at formal meetings and free up time for main business. It was suggested such reports could be provided in an information bulletin, and members would continue to be able to bring issues to Panel meetings if they wished.

## **3. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

### **3.1 Portfolio Plans – Looking Back at 2009/10**

The Panel considered the performance of the Policy and Resources and Finance and Efficiency Portfolios 2009/10.

Councils were more than ever having to make important decisions about where money was being spent. The work undertaken over the last year in saving £2.5m would continue.

### **3.2 Medium Term Financial Plan 2011-2012 and Employee Savings Initiative**

The Panel received a detailed breakdown of the quantified savings and efficiencies for both Portfolios for 2011/12, together with an outline of the various workstreams, including planned future reviews.

The Panel were pleased to note the involvement of Council staff in the process and the results of the Employees' Savings Ideas Initiative. Officers had tried to produce savings without a major impact on services. Negotiations on joint working with the National Park Authority and other external bodies were on-going.

## **4. OTHER ISSUES**

The following reports were also received by the Panel:-

- Annual Workforce Report 2009/10
- Sickness Absence Update
- Annual Report on Treasury Management Service and Actual Prudential Indicators
- Members' IT Provision
- Contract Standing Orders – Waivers Report 2009/10
- Catering
- Complaints

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

The Corporate Overview Panel has overview of the full range of the responsibilities and duties of the Council.

During the early part of the year, Mark Palmer and his team from South East Employers produced the Report on Scrutiny in NFDC and this was finally approved by COP recently. There had been some delay due to the interest by some members in aspects of the Localism Bill currently going through Parliament. I do believe that the revised structures being proposed will improve the Scrutiny function in the Council. However the Chairs & Vice Chairs will need to monitor its introduction over the next 12 months and tweak the proposals in the recommendations as experience suggests.

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. I particularly thank 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 keeping 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 - 2010/2011

## 1. MAJOR AREAS OF INTEREST

### 1.1 Community Safety Partnership

The Panel is now responsible for scrutinising the activities of the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership under provisions in the Police and Justice Act 2006. It was agreed that a light touch approach should be taken, with one annual joint meeting and any scrutiny reviews being identified through the Partnership's work programme. The Hampshire Police Authority has been co-opted on to the Committee, with one non-voting member, in accordance with Government guidelines. The Police Authority representative and police are now regular attendees at the meetings of the Panel.

The Panel met the Partnership most recently in October 2010 and discussed and agreed with the 5 priorities and 9 action plans that had been developed through the Strategic Assessment. The challenges presented by increasing budget cuts were the main area of discussion. Funding for this Partnership's priorities has contracted steadily under revised funding arrangements and suffered significantly this year with a 50% in-year cut as a result of the coalition government's decision to reduce area based grant funding. Future funding was the major topic for debate, and it was agreed that further work was necessary to look at ways of delivering services with significantly reduced resources.

### 1.2 Drug and Alcohol Treatment

The Panel undertook an extensive review of the availability of treatment for drug and alcohol dependency for local people. Substance abuse has been identified as a major promoter of criminal behaviour. The review was timely as the contract for the provision of treatment services in the District has recently been put out to tender, with the new contractor taking over from 1 April 2011.

The organisational structures for providing treatment are very complex and it took some research on behalf of the Panel to establish how the system operated. The Panel received evidence from representatives of the probation service, Crime Reduction Initiatives (a contractor who was providing services for the probation service and who are now sub contracted to provide treatment for non offender clients in this District), The Society of St James, (which is now subcontracted to treat offenders in the Forest), the Drug and Alcohol Advisory Service and Drug and Alcohol Action Team. Sue Wilks, the Commissioning Manager with the Drug and Alcohol Action Team was particularly helpful in providing information on the tendering process for the new contract arrangements. The Panel was satisfied that the new delivery structure had the potential to provide better treatment accessibility for local people. The main contract has now been awarded to the Solent Care NHS Trust. The Panel has agreed to look at progress under the new contract after a year. The interest shown in this topic area improved the provider's focus on the needs of local people and is likely to have improved the ultimate outcome for local residents.

### **1.3 Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill**

The Panel has discussed the proposals in this Bill on several occasions. The concept of introducing Police and Crime Commissioners emerged in a consultation paper published in the middle of last year and the Panel expressed strong reservations about the concept, a view expressed in many other quarters. There was support for other measures in the proposals that could lead to reductions in bureaucracy. The proposals have come forward in the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill. The Panel discussed the proposals in detail and submitted views to the Public Bill Committee of the House of Commons who are considering the proposals.

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

### **2.1 Accredited Community Safety Officers (ACSOs)**

This Council used to contribute to the cost of providing 2 ACSOs operating predominantly in the Totton area. The decision to cease funding these posts, without prior consultation with the Panel, caused considerable disquiet when it came to light in discussions on the Portfolio Plan.

The Panel asked the County Council for information on the operation of the ACSOs in this District. They were somewhat disappointed that the information provided was out of date and gave no measurement of effectiveness. Since, by that time, the Council was no longer funding posts, the Panel did not feel it was appropriate to press for additional information.

### **2.2 CCTV AND EMERGENCY PLANNING**

The Panel received regular reports on progress with the new maintenance contract for the CCTV system and also the installation of the extensions in New Milton and Hythe. The Panel continue to maintain a watching brief on operations and effectiveness.

However Members are becoming increasingly anxious about the lack of resource to manage this asset, as there has been no officer in place during the last year to assume the responsibilities of the CCTV and Licensing Manager. This post also has responsibility for the Council's emergency planning functions, which are a statutory duty.

The Panel have had a number of emergency planning matters in their work programme for some months and are concerned to see that there has been no meaningful activity by the officers in these work areas over recent months. The Panel noted that the officer support for the community safety function was dependent solely on the Community Safety Officer and a small fraction of the time of the Head of Public Health and Community Safety. The issue was therefore a lack of resources. This



matter was discussed with the Portfolio Holder at the meeting in March and it was agreed that the Panel's concerns would be drawn to the attention of the Chief Executive.

### **2.3 Licensed Premises and Problem Behaviours**

This issue was raised by Cllrs M S Wade and Penwarden who questioned whether this Authority was sufficiently proactive in using its powers as the licensing authority to respond to premises that were associated with problem behaviours. This was prompted by 2 cases where Licensing Panels reviewed the licenses of premises that had been the source of complaints for over 18 months. This issue is being addressed through the General Purposes and Licensing Committee's review of the Statement of Licensing Policy.

### **2.4 Neighbourhood Watch Schemes**

There was some initial confusion about the operating arrangements for Neighbourhood Watch and the actions being taken to reinvigorate Neighbourhood Watch in communities across the District. Mr King of the Police Authority did further research and established that the Police were committed to increasing their support for Neighbourhood Watch and had recently signed up to a new model Service Level Agreement with the Hampshire Neighbourhood Watch Group which co-ordinated all the local schemes. It was recognised that the records on active groups and current contacts were out of date and attempts were being made to remedy this. The Police would be investing resources in supporting and co-ordinating Neighbourhood Watch schemes. Most recently, Mr King has been able to report steady progress in revitalising the Neighbourhood Watch schemes around the County, including in the New Forest and also that the police are specifically investing in assistance for schemes in Lymington and Brockenhurst. The Police are also paying much greater attention to the intelligence gathered from this source. Neighbourhood Watch schemes will be considerably helped by new web based crime maps and social network style contact groups which will help to get key information to affected people quickly.

### **2.5 Portfolio Holder**

The Panel continues to enjoy a close working relationship with the Portfolio Holder. The Portfolio Holder has reported to every meeting on the activities that he has been carrying out. This has provided an opportunity for Panel Members to question him and also to raise individual matters of concern, that are then taken up by the Portfolio Holder.

## **3. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

### **3.1 Portfolio Plan and Medium Term Financial Plan**

The Panel reviewed the Portfolio Plan, both looking back at performance over the last year and also the setting of priorities and the allocation of resources for the coming year. The Panel expressed some concerns about the operation of the system and the degree to which they were being given the opportunity to comment, in a meaningful way. Decisions were so advanced by the time the Panel had sight of them through the Portfolio Plan that the decision had effectively been made without them having the opportunity to influence the outcome. The Panel asked that, in future, major proposals should be brought to them at an earlier stage.

The Panel discussed the Medium Term Financial Plan which was developed to respond to the cuts required following the Comprehensive Spending Review and were satisfied that these were essential. The Panel has however asked for greater thought to be given to ways in which the crime and disorder implications of decisions can still receive proper consideration during the Council's decision making processes.

### **3.2 Crime Levels**

The Panel was pleased to note that, as a result of the various initiatives in place through the Safer New Forest Crime Reduction Partnership, there has been a reduction in crime numbers of 1000 in the Forest over the last year. This follows a reduction of 1,500 in the previous year.

While the general crime trend was downwards there was an increase in some crime types, particularly theft from vehicles and action plans have been put in place to try to reverse that trend.

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

Whilst the panel has looked at issues this year like Drug and Alcohol Treatment, Neighbourhood Watch and engaged tentatively with the Community Safety Partnership with a view to trying to exert positive influence where possible, it has not been able to impact any of these areas to any great degree, partly due to the current environment and to the fact that as a scrutiny panel we have limited influence with partnership agencies. In Council Community safety decisions, where it should have the ability to influence, it has continued to be, as in previous years, marginalised by the executive, which takes decisions and tells the panel afterwards. The examples this year being the withdrawal of funding for ACSOs in Totton and the medium term financial planning both of which were decisions taken without any reference to the panel. If this administration wishes to take scrutiny and development seriously it should have engaged with panel and used its knowledge and experience in the community safety field to help it make better quality decisions on what is a topic of major concern to the residents of the New Forest.

**Cllr M S Wade**

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

Over the last year, the Panel has monitored and challenged all aspects relating to Crime and Disorder with some frustrations but also with some successes.

Frustrations relate to our limited influence with partnership agencies but also with Executive decisions made without prior reference to the Panel who, after all, have a specialised interest in Crime and Disorder.

Success resulted after the Panel's evaluation of presentations from the Acceptable Behaviour Contracts Officer and the Crime Analyst. The Council subsequently was satisfied that the posts represented good value in meeting the organisation's objectives and the posts are now core funded.

A further success was in connection with CCTV where the Panel's involvement has ensured that the Police recognise the importance of feeding back information on the outcomes of CCTV interventions and better information is now provided. More information will be published on a regular basis.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all members of the Panel for their enthusiastic input over the last year. Special thanks to my Vice Chairman, Councillor Steve Davis, to the Portfolio Holder for taking such a pro active and supportive interest in the work of the Panel 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 - 2010/11

## 1. ITEMS WHERE AN ISSUE WAS CONSIDERED OR INFORMATION GATHERED

### 1.1 Enabling Independent Living by Older People / Personalised Care/ Self Directed Support (SDS)

The Panel has been looking at various issues around enabling independent living by older people.

The Panel wished to:-

- Increase understanding of the subject
- Promote joint working to improve delivery of services
- Be satisfied that the way the Council supports meeting the needs of this demographic group
- To agree suggestions for improvement

Three persons from external organisations were invited to attend Panel meetings so that the Panel could gather information about the topic, and perhaps enhance the Council's role.

Caroline England Commissioning Manager, Adult Services, Hampshire County Council and Jean Adams, Chief Executive Officer, Age Concern New Forest East were in attendance and gave presentations on their areas of involvement.

3 elements of helping older people in independent living were:

- Gardening
- 'Befriending'
- Hospital Discharges

Jean Adams, gave a presentation on the work of Age Concern.

The aims of Age Concern included assistance with:

- Activities to help older people
- Friendship and social contact
- Liaising with other authorities to network resources
- Home visits
- Freephone provided by Exxon

The Panel also received a presentation from Sarah Simms, Communications Officer, Self Directed Support, Hampshire County Council on developments in Adult Social Care, specifically SDS. The presentation covered the key parts of the personalisation initiative, and the various strands of local and national legislative influences.

The function had moved from a service-led model to a user-led model. It was felt the service led model had provided limited choice for service users. The former system had involved an initial client assessment, followed by a package devised and procured by HCC. Factors such as an ageing population, changes in expectations, complexity of needs, financial constraints and the need for proactive support to alleviate pressures on hospitals, had led to the change. SDS meant that, once users were given an assessment, they could choose their preferred care package and who would provide it. Clients now have the option to receive cash payments direct, though there were strict controls to avoid potential abuse. Clients could use their funds to select their preferred provider, or request HCC to procure one.

Currently, SDS was available to user groups such as older people, people with physical disabilities and learning disabilities.

Although the Council's involvement in these issues was minimal in terms of services it provided, the Council nonetheless had a Corporate Aim of 'Valuing and Supporting Older People', and was looking for ways in which it could do more to work with its partners in this regard. It was suggested that the Council's work be directed towards ensuring a 'consistent offer' across the District was available to older people.

The Council would be looking at other councils to see what else might be done to assist older people. All of the above suggestions were to be taken to the next Older People Community Action Network.

## **1.2 Ambulance Service – Monitoring Local Service Levels**

The Panel has been monitoring the performance of the South Central Ambulance Service after it had received poor performance ratings. Cllr Dr Whitehead had reported that the performance had been of particular concern in New Forest West.

A joint Scrutiny Group comprising members drawn from 3 other local authorities had drawn up recommendations for improvements and this had been the subject of various reports to the Panel in recent times. Dr Ian Kidson had been pursuing the matter locally and had provided a significant amount of useful data.

The Ambulance Trust had undertaken a review of deployment and there had been a significant improvement in some areas, but there was still a long way to go in terms of obtaining a consistent service overall. There was also a need for formal cross-boundary arrangements.

It was hoped that Dr Kidson could attend a future Panel meeting to discuss progress and it was agreed that the matter should be monitored and regular reports made to members as necessary.

## **1.3 Hythe Hospital**

An issue was raised relating to a document produced by the Waterside Practitioner Based Commissioning Locality concerning the Waterside Services Development, and in particular the Hythe Hospital. The document appeared to suggest a strategy which may go against previous promises that the Hospital would be kept open, and she

proposed that this issue be pursued by the Panel. Among concerns were that the Minor Injuries Unit had been closed, and there had been had a number of bed closures. There had been assurances made about the reopening of beds but the deadline had passed without this happening, due to a number of factors.

The matter was monitored and in the light of developments it was not felt necessary to pursue this matter as things appeared to be moving in the right direction. It was noted that the Hampshire County Council Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee had sanctioned the formation of a group to monitor the situation, and had co-opted Cllr Mrs Robinson onto the group as a local ward member. The group evaluated local engagement activities organised by the NHS concerning the Hospital and the Medical Centre. It was evident the NHS did see a future for Hythe Hospital, but the position with the re-instatement of the beds there was unclear. The overall position would not be clear until issues around the Practice Based Commissioning Group and the NHS White Paper had crystallized.

#### **1.4 Liberating the NHS: Increasing Democratic Legitimacy in Health – Consultation**

The Panel considered the implications of the Government White Paper concerning the future of the NHS.

The white paper was wide ranging and represented the biggest change to health provision since inception of the National Health Service in 1948. The notable points were:-

- The delegation of health commissioning to GPs
- The abolition of Strategic Health Authorities from 2012
- Transfer of responsibility for public health to top tier councils
- The abolition of Primary Care Trusts from April 2013

The Panel supported the measures in the Consultation Paper which allow a greater influence on local District health provision and priorities, and agreed that the District Council should continue to develop a positive relationship with the current Practice Based Commissioning (PBC) groups and any new fora.

#### **1.5 Improving Career Prospects for Young People in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry**

The Panel has been investigating ways in which to improve the career prospects of young people in the local hospitality and tourism industry. The Panel undertook a thorough scoping of this issue at the last meeting and agreed a number of avenues for enquiry.

New Forest Tourism and College representatives were invited to a Panel meeting to give their perspective on these issues by way of background information for the Panel. It was hoped that the College, the NFTA and the Council would work together to identify solutions to improve prospects for young people in the tourism and hospitality industries. Mr Tim Howell, Chairman of New Forest Tourism Association and Managing Director of Sandy Balls Holiday Park, Mr Derek Mather, Vice-Principal of Brockenhurst College and Mr John McArthur, Brockenhurst College were present at the meeting.

That there were 3,000 students at Brockenhurst College aged 16-19. 45% of these were in areas other than the New Forest, for example Bournemouth, Poole, East Dorset, Salisbury, Eastleigh, Southampton and the Isle of Wight. Each year there were 2,000 leavers, and of those 600 moved into higher education, leaving 1,400 looking for employment.

Currently at Brockenhurst College 80 students were in tourism courses, approximately 70 in hospitality courses, and 100 in work based learning programmes. Colleges could

not fulfil the requests for manpower from the industry.

The image of the hospitality industry in the UK needs to be improved. In France, someone working as a waiter in a prestige establishment could earn up to £100,000 whereas in the UK, such professions are not as well valued. In today's times, a career in tourism or hospitality is much more stable and secure than large areas of the private and public sector, and it is felt these facts should be exploited when promoting the industry.

It was anticipated that apprenticeships will be in stronger demand, and it is important that these were geared to industry needs. Brockenhurst College currently has a number of apprentices.

The Panel decided the action plan should include the creation of a recruitment page on the Destination website which would advertise job vacancies which could be made available to students at Brockenhurst College and other further educational establishments.

It was hoped this first step could provide a good platform for links between the industry and the colleges.

## **2. PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

### **2.1 Portfolio Plans – Looking Back At 2009/10 / Medium Term Financial Plan 2011/2012**

The Panel reviewed the performance of the portfolio for 2009/10 and the Medium Term Financial Plan and draft annual budget for 2011/2012. The impact of the reduced grant settlement amounted to a reduction of 26% over the next 2 years. Savings of £2.7m were required in 2011/12.

Over the past 5 years there had been a £600k reduction in senior management salary costs at the Council, and £1m in the last 10 years. Nevertheless, a review of Senior Management would look to identify future savings which would be proportionate and consistent with the overall approach.

The Panel concurred with the proposals.

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

This report indicates the wide nature of the brief held by the Employment Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel, ranging from the social care of the elderly to improving the career prospects for our local young people in the hospitality and tourism industry.

Reorganising the agenda so that one general theme was addressed at each meeting and asking expert speakers to answer questions at meetings has been a positive way to manage the panel's time; however, although better informed, I am not entirely clear what changes have been made by virtue of these meetings.

The largest topic to be considered by the next council will be changes to the structure of The National Health Service.

We still have problems with emergency ambulance times in the rural and semirural areas of the Northwest of the District, and I would hope that a meeting could be held soon with Dr Kidson which would allow the full Council to support the detailed work he has done on this subject. However the major interest in health for the council will be the abolition of the PCTs, the introduction of GP commissioning, and the transfer of the public health function to top tier councils.

There is much to scrutinise in these arrangements, particularly that the Forest, because of the nature of its settlements, may find that we do not end up with one forest wide commissioning group, but with groups that look outwards towards Salisbury in the North, Bournemouth in the South West and Southampton in the East. It is very possible that the district will be criss-crossed by the boundaries of commissioning groups.

Public health is another function that lends itself to collaboration between the health service and the local councils; there is an opportunity here for local communities and for councils and the health service to work together and to engage with the governments drive for better health for their populations, rather than focussing on disease management.

**Cllr Dr M N Whitehead**

#### **4. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS**

Once again we have had a year of complex and varied business. We have gained a better knowledge of the issues, and have made some modest contributions towards improvements such as steps towards assisting young people's career prospects in the local hospitality industry. As all members are aware, the Panels are due to be revised and we look forward to meeting new challenges and working with a sharper scrutiny system. My thanks go to Members of the Panel and officers for all their support, not just over the past 12 months, but since the inception of this Panel.

**Cllr Mrs A M Rostand**

Chairman, Employment, Health and Wellbeing Review Panel



# ENVIRONMENT REVIEW PANEL REPORT - 2010/11

## 1. MAJOR AREAS OF INTEREST

### 1.1 Adverse Weather Conditions

The Panel have received reports after the bad winter weather in 2009 and 2010 to look at how well the Council had responded to the challenges posed by the snow and icy conditions. The Panel satisfied itself that in each case, the lessons to be learned had been drawn out and taken forwards. This included increasing the stocks of salt being held, and distributing them across the depots. More salt bins have been provided around the District and arrangements made with the County Council for us to service their bins while topping up our own, at sheltered housing schemes and car parks. More shovels were bought after the 2009/10 winter, which helped the Council's ability to respond in December 2010. Similarly, more 4 wheel drive vehicles were included in the procurement programme.

The inclement weather in December 2010 raised fresh challenges, particularly to keep the shopping centres open in the busy shopping period leading up to Christmas, and to prevent the build up of backlogs of refuse for collection. The Panel were particularly appreciative of the efforts made by all the depots staff in this period. Not only had essential access been maintained well, but unlike other areas, all properties had received a refuse collection by the New Year.

### 1.2 Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act

This area of work has proved somewhat problematical for the Panel. They have monitored the effectiveness of the Council's performance using the powers in this legislation and had concerns about the lack of activity and success in a number of enforcement areas. As a result, the Panel established a joint Member and Officer Working Group to investigate the barriers that existed to greater effectiveness and to develop recommendations on how to improve performance, particularly through the greater use of fixed penalty notices. This work stalled as the financial constraints



facing the Council became apparent. At the present time there is still insufficient clarity on the resources available for enforcement, as the expenditure reductions take effect.

The process did promote work to improve the Council's processes, for example on the collection of evidence to ensure a better chance of success in prosecutions for fly tipping. In addition, there has been a very notable success through the adoption of powers to charge supermarkets for the storage and return of abandoned shopping trolleys, as recommended by the Panel. The adoption of the powers, together with the use of warning letters, has proved very effective in reducing the number of abandoned shopping trolleys in town centres.

### **1.3 Coastal Defence and Shoreline Management**

The Panel has been consulted on two Shoreline Management Plans (Poole and Christchurch Bay; and North Solent) which were prepared to guide management of the coastline in coming years. Following concerns expressed by Members about the lack of opportunity for Councillors to be consulted on the Poole and Christchurch Bay Plan, prior to publication for consultation, representations were made to the Steering Committee and arrangements were improved.

The Panel considered both Plans, and made recommendations to the Cabinet, both prior to the public consultation process and also on the final proposed plans, in the light of the responses received. The Plans have both now been formally adopted by the Council and are awaiting final approval by the Environment Agency on behalf of Defra.

### **1.4 Project Integra**

The practical operations and outcomes from Project Integra have been an area of concern over recent years, with the Panel perceiving a lack of strategic direction and insufficient drive towards exploring additional materials for recycling and new markets. A number of reports were requested on research being carried out through Project Integra as information was not being fed back to the partner organisations on the outcomes of research. The publication of the report into research into potential additional materials for kerbside collection was a particular disappointment for the Panel as there were minimal outcomes and the ideas generated at workshops Members had attended appeared to have been dismissed. The Head of Environment Services was asked to investigate the underlying research, as Members were not satisfied that the report represented good value for money. The investigation established that although a lot of research had been done, a significant proportion of it had been misdirected and intrinsically unlikely to produce a useful outcome. Therefore, although the Panel was satisfied that the money had been spent as claimed, they remained concerned about the poor quality of the outcome.

Following on from the report there have been some welcome developments. When the Materials Recycling Facilities are refitted in the near future the capacity will be included to sort and batch all plastics, which will allow clearer messages to be disseminated on recycling, and may open the potential for additional market streams.

Through their representative on the Scrutiny Group, the Panel continue to re-emphasise the importance of waste minimisation messages, not just re-use and recycling.

In the light of mounting concerns among the partner organisations, Project Integra themselves instigated a fundamental review of their operations and published a report late last year, which was considered by the Panel, who made detailed recommendations to the Portfolio Holder, to inform this Council's formal response. The Panel's comments formed the substantive part of the Council's response, which was agreed at the meeting of the Cabinet in March.

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

### **2.1 Refuse Collection and Recycling**

The majority of this work has been carried out through the Refuse Collection and Recycling Working Party which have been waiting for the outcome of various reviews through Project Integra. The review of potential additional materials for kerbside collection for recycling was particularly disappointing for the Working Party who had been waiting for fresh ideas to open up other options for consideration in this Authority.

The more major topics which have been considered by the Working Party are covered under separate headings, but the Working Party's recommendations have included:

- Not to support funding for further research by Project Integra unless there are clearly defined outcomes and mechanisms through which to feed the results back to the Partner organisations.
- To enter into an arrangement with SCA at Hounslow for the future handling of paper for recycling
- Not to introduce separate food waste collections for composting, at this time, but to keep a watching brief on developing technologies as anaerobic digestion may ultimately prove a more ecologically sound solution than incineration.
- Continued re-emphasis on the need for waste minimisation and proper attention to the hierarchy of waste, with re-use being the next preferred option, before recycling.

### **2.2 Refuse Collection and Recycling Collection Round Review**

The Panel was consulted on and supported proposed changes to the refuse collection and recycling collection rounds. The rounds were completely re-designed to optimise vehicle movements and reduce wasted journey times. As a result very significant savings have been made. The Panel satisfied themselves that the changes were soundly based and also that the employees involved were happy with the proposed changes. The Panel has received regular updates on progress in implementation.

### **2.3 Green Audit**

The Panel took over responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the various action plans in 2009 and now receives progress reports at alternate meetings.

The Council has achieved good progress on all the action plans which were developed through the Green Audit process and the updates have included some information on the savings which are being made as a consequence. Additional measures continue to be explored for all of the Council's properties and equipment, and the Panel have been kept informed as new initiatives, such as consideration of installing solar photovoltaic panels, are explored.

### **2.4. Land Drainage**

The Panel has kept a watching brief on the outcome of the Pitt review into the flooding in the Summer of 2007. The Flood and Water Management Act 2010, which resulted from the Pitt review, introduced a new role of Lead Local Flood Authority for county and unitary authorities. The County Council has created the Hampshire Strategic Flood and Water Management Group to deal with its new responsibilities. This Council has a duty to cooperate with the Group to develop and deliver a Hampshire Flood Risk Management Strategy. This strategy will determine the future involvement of all the Hampshire district councils in local flood risk management.

The Panel are also mindful of the difficulties experienced in the Development Control function of the authority. At present the water companies could fail to respond to

planning consultations in areas where there were flooding issues to avoid the need to take action to remedy existing problems. It is hoped that the increased role of Flood and Water Management Boards will increase pressure on the companies to take action.

### **3. Performance Management**

#### **3.1 Portfolio Plan and Medium Term Financial Plan**

The Panel examined performance under the Environment Portfolio in September, as part of normal processes for performance review. The Panel explored the reasons for any divergences from the agreed indicators of performance.

Following the Comprehensive Spending Review, the Panel examined in detail the revised medium term financial plan for the Environment Portfolio. They questioned the savings being made to establish that these were soundly based and would not prejudice key longer term objectives, such as the saving of resource use through the implementation of the improvement plans from the Green Audit.

The Panel was satisfied that the savings proposed were achievable, without affecting front line services and arose from taking the opportunity to use existing resources more efficiently.

#### **3.2 Environment Services Operational Performance**

In 2008/09 the nature of the partnership with Test Valley Borough Council changed, keeping some operational links but removing the need for a controlling Board and Scrutiny Committee. The scrutiny review function for Environment Services has therefore reverted back to this Council. The Panel now receive operational updates every 6 months, which highlight any new developments or deviations from expected trends.

The Panel were briefed on the reasons why the Council was not achieving its target for recycling performance of 31% during the early part of 2010. They were however satisfied with the Council's performance on street cleanliness and missed bin collection statistics.

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

In spite of the lack of progress in widening the range of recyclable materials that are collected from the kerbside, Project Integra (PI) remains an efficient and mostly cost-effective operation, and the infrastructure of Materials Recovery Facilities (for sorting recyclables and forwarding them to recycling plants) and Energy From Waste plants (energy fed to the grid from the burning of waste) is one of the most well-developed in the UK. However PI has become complacent, and innovative initiatives by, for example, Eastleigh Borough Council, are not emulated by others. Eastleigh is willing to invest in sustainable energy projects which are not yet mainstream, such as anaerobic digestion of food waste for methane production. Nevertheless the composting of food and other organic waste at home needs further promotion.

The collection and recycling of commercial waste needs to be addressed with vigour in order to apply the same criteria to waste from businesses as are used in the processing of domestic waste – this has got to be a rich resource of potentially recyclable materials which is in many cases untapped.

Most other authorities that are partners within PI are constrained by the financial bottom line, and proactive and creative thinking on green issues may be limited. New Forest is giving insufficient weight to the promotion of reduction of waste and reuse of redundant household items and other materials rather than buying new. More pressure on government is required to give greater impetus to the sustainable agenda, to push for the reduction of packaging, to address seriously the continuing reluctance of supermarkets to discourage reliance on use-once plastic bags and the reluctance of manufacturers to limit the plastics they use for containers, for example yoghurt pots,

to type 1 (PET), which is also used for drinks bottles, thus increasing the renewable plastics stream.

Government also needs to be lobbied to change the existing toothless anti-littering legislation. Prosecution of those who throw litter from car windows is virtually unknown, since the offender must be positively identified and cars cannot be followed or stopped by local authority officers. Surely it would be more logical to take the registration number and prosecute the owner of the car. He or she should carry the responsibility for managing the behaviour of passengers and pay the fine if they litter the roadside.

The sad truth is that the UK government purports to be the 'greenest ever', but our country lies at position 25 out of 27 in terms of its production of energy from sustainable sources. There is massive renewable energy potential in the tides and flows around our shores and even in our rivers. However there appears to be no consistent and coherent strategy to drag us up from the bottom rungs of the 'sustainability league'. 31% still appears to me to be an inadequate proportion of waste recycled, whilst authorities such as Eastleigh are approaching 50%. Moreover, many of us have so little respect for the environment we live in that along the principal roads through the New Forest we inevitably see cans, bottles, plastic bags, packaging and food containers lying in the grass and the gorse and sometimes even within inclosures. Why have we been left so far behind by our colleagues in mainland Europe on these crucial issues? Has the UK become the litter pariah of Western Europe?

**Cllr P E Hickman**

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

This has been another busy year with the Panel looking at many very important subjects. The review of the refuse collection rounds has been a particularly interesting area of work and has achieved very significant savings as a result. I am very pleased that, through prudent management, front line services to the public under the Environment Portfolio will continue in the challenging financial climate within which we now find ourselves.

I would like to thank all of the Panel for their loyal support during the last year and for their willingness to attend meetings and take part in our debates. Our debates have been lively but always courteous and constructive. I must thank in particular my Vice Chairman, Fran Carpenter, and the opposition spokesman, Paul Hickman, both of whom have worked very hard not least through representing the Council's interests on some important outside bodies. The Portfolio Holder has also been a regular and welcome visitor to our meetings and I am pleased that we have enjoyed such a constructive relationship with him.

Finally, I would like to thank the officers for their professionalism and support for the work of the Panel, and for their assistance to me in my role as Chairman.

**Cllr Ms L C Ford**

Chairman, Environment Review Panel



## HOUSING REVIEW PANEL - 2010/11

### 1. MAJOR REVIEWS

#### 1.1 Review of Sheltered Accommodation in the New Forest

The Panel has continued to review the process for changes to the sheltered housing accommodation. In view of the importance of this matter all members of the Council were invited to attend a panel meeting to participate in the discussion. The decommissioning of schemes is continuing and key members and officers have undertaken site visits to these schemes to discuss concerns with tenants. These discussions have helped to alleviate concerns of tenants and identify priorities for taking the review forward.

The review was undertaken primarily as a result of a change in the Supporting People funding arrangements by HCC. From 1 April 2012 NFDC's re-named older person's service will move more towards meeting the personalisation agenda and direct the funding for housing related support to the individual rather than simply to older people just because they live in sheltered housing.

The first phase of the proposals focused primarily on changes to accommodation and the decommissioning of a number of existing sheltered housing schemes. The second phase of implementing the necessary change is now well underway.

Tenants will have a choice of whether or not they wish to receive support when the new service is launched and a new 'needs assessment' will be undertaken with all tenants six months prior to the launch of the new service.

The Panel will continue to monitor the changes that are taking place and receive regular updates on the process.

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

### **2.1 Tenant Services Authority – Local Standards**

From April 2010 social housing landlords had to apply new standards as set out by the Tenant Services Authority (TSA). The regulatory framework, developed in collaboration with tenants, local authorities and housing associations aims to improve the services provided for people who live in social rented and shared ownership homes.

The Panel has considered in detail the remit of the TSA and how the new standards would affect this Council and its tenants. In line with the guidance the Panel, in full consultation with the tenants, supported local guidelines. The new standards are proving invaluable to tenant estate inspectors and there has been positive feedback from tenants themselves. Arrangements are in place to enable tenants to monitor and scrutinise the Council's performance against these standards. Tenants, in their first annual report as part of this new regime, said that they considered the process a useful tool to monitor the Council's performance and benchmark the Council against other local authorities.

### **2.2 NFDC House Building Programme Pilot**

The Panel has, during the year, been significantly involved in the pilot to construct nine new homes at Howards Mead, Pennington. The Panel was very pleased when in March 2010 planning permission was given and a building contractor was appointed. Progress was good. However, in light of the Government's agenda to reduce the national deficit, the original funding allocation for the Howards Mead project changed.

A new funding offer of £600,000 from the National Affordable Housing Programme was offered but was conditional on NFDC funding the remainder of the scheme (estimated £800,000) through other means. Supported by the Panel the Council agreed that the NFDC element of the costs would be funded from the Housing Revenue Account reserves.

The project has now started, with a new contractor (the original contractor went into liquidation), with completion due by March 2012. The Panel will continue to monitor progress on the project.

### **2.3 Strategic Housing Team Restructure – Update**

The Panel was pleased to support the restructure of two existing teams into a single Strategic Housing Team with effect from 1 April 2010. The new team covers strategy and development and private sector housing. The team has worked well and has been very successful in reducing the Disabled Facilities Grant waiting list. The restructuring has also saved the Council approximately £50,000 per annum.

### **2.4 Housing Revenue Account Reform**

The Panel has commented on a Government consultation "Council Housing: A Real Future" which sets out proposals for the reform of council housing finance. The current housing finance system stems from a requirement of the 1935 Housing Act which requires local authorities to keep a separate Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The HRA was a separate record of revenue expenditure and income relating to an Authority's own housing stock.

The HRA is a ring-fenced account within the General Fund. It ensures that rent levels cannot be subsidised by increases in council tax and that rents cannot be increased to keep council tax levels down.

The HRA subsidy system is how the Government determines the amounts local authorities need to spend on their council housing and whether a subsidy is required to support this. New Forest District Council is in negative subsidy and this means they are required to make a contribution (currently calculated at nearly £9m per annum) to

the Government. This means that nearly 40% of the rent that any tenant pays goes to the Government and brings no benefit to the District.

There are many complexities in withdrawing from the HRA housing subsidy system. Whilst the Council would gain independence to control the Council's HRA and would no longer have to pay annual subsidies, they would have to take on a large debt of £132m when the currently they are debt free. The Panel consider the Government's methods of calculating the debts for individual authorities are unfair and, despite being a debt free, responsible social landlord, NFDC would be penalised. Southern authorities would have to take on large debts to off-set debts built up by northern councils. This is a significant issue that could have serious ramifications for the future stability of the Council's finances.

A response to the consultation document, detailing the points raised, was sent in June 2010. The Government has recently published their proposals for implementing HRA reform with an implementation date of April 2012.

## **2.5 'Local Decisions : A Fairer Future For Social Housing'**

In November 2010 the Government issued a consultation paper ('Local Decisions: a Fairer Future for Social Housing') setting out its intentions to change the legislation on tenure, allocations and homelessness. The provisions were introduced in the forthcoming Localism Bill.

The two main aspects of reform are in relation to Tenure and Allocations.

Currently tenants have a lifetime security of tenure. This means that local authorities are normally required to offer secure tenancies which enable tenants to remain in occupation for their lifetime provided they do not breach the terms of their tenancy.

The Consultation Paper proposes other types of tenure that will give greater flexibility and enable local authorities to offer a 'flexible tenancy' with a range of fixed periods alongside secure tenancies. The Council could, if they choose, move to shorter tenancies for new applications, which will enable a quicker response to need. Whilst having a variety of types of tenure will be complicated to administer it is a positive way of making the best use of very limited resources.

For allocations, the new arrangements will give local authorities the freedom to determine which categories of applicants can qualify to join a waiting list rather than have an open list to which everyone can apply to be registered.

The Panel supported the Portfolio Holder's response to the consultation.

## **2.6 Tenants' Improvements and Fixtures and Fittings in Void Properties**

With the support of the Panel, new void property standards have been agreed clarifying how the removal or retention of "Non standard fixtures and fittings" is managed.

It is helpful to both the Council and to tenants to have clear standards set out to ensure fairness and consistency for all. New tenants will be given a copy of the Void Property Standards at the time they sign their tenancy agreement.

## **2.7 Environmental Enhancements to Housing Stock**

The Government, through the Climate Change Act 2008, set targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through domestic and international action by at least 34% by 2020 and 80% by 2050, against a 1990 emission baseline. With the aim of achieving such reductions, the UK Renewable Energy Strategy set out a target for 15% of the UK's energy requirement to come from renewable energy sources in 2020.

The Panel is supporting work being undertaken to assess the feasibility of using greener technologies within the Housing stock. Recent years have seen the introduction of new green technologies including thermal solar panels, photovoltaic

solar panels (Solar PV), biomass boilers, heat pumps and wind turbines. There are also now extra opportunities arising with the introduction of Feed in Tariffs (FITs) and the future introduction of Renewable Heating Incentives (RHIs).

The Council has started to investigate the potential for Solar PV on both the Housing stock and Civic buildings by setting up a Renewable Energy/FIT group to look at the options.

## **2.8 Housing Benefit Changes**

The Panel has received a detailed report on the changes to housing benefits (HB). HB has been administered by local authorities on behalf of central government since October 1982. It costs taxpayers £21 billion a year nationally and this is projected to rise to £25 billion by 2015. In the June 2010 emergency budget, the Government announced changes to Housing Benefits. Some of the changes have now been made law, and enabling Regulations come into force from April 2011. Tenants of private landlords will be most affected by the changes.

HB expenditure for the year 2010/11 is estimated at £40M in the New Forest, for which the Department for Work and Pensions reimburses the Council. Council Tax Benefit (CTB) for householders liable to pay council tax (which is most HB claimants and about 2,500 owner occupiers as well) adds a further £10M to the cost in the New Forest, making a total of £50M.

The changes are estimated to reduce national HB expenditure by £1.0 - 2.0 billion over a 4-year period. In the New Forest the changes are estimated to reduce annual benefit payments by about £1.2M when fully implemented.

The Panel will continue to monitor the changes and will consider further reports on the matter as more information becomes available.

## **3. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

### **3.1 Portfolio Plans – Looking Back at 2009/10 and Performance Indicators**

The Housing Portfolio continues to face many challenges as a result of the current economic situation, particularly in relation to the provision of affordable housing in the district. Notwithstanding this, it is hoped that this priority target will stabilise as a result of continued communication between the Council's housing officers and registered social landlords.

The Panel continues to monitor a broad range of performance indicators across the Housing Service. Overall the Panel is pleased that the Housing Service remains a good performing Service, and Tenant satisfaction levels remain high. The Council has put various measures in place to mitigate the rise in the levels of homelessness. The measures include lending deposits for private sector rents, mediation and the 'Sanctuary Scheme'. All these methods prevent the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

It is particularly pleasing to note that the Disabled Facilities Grant waiting list has been reduced and is being maintained at a low level. The average waiting time is now a few days rather than a number of weeks.

### **3.2 Medium Term Financial Plan 2011/2012**

The Panel was able to recommend to the Cabinet savings of over £80,000 for 2011/12 which had been achieved mainly through holding vacant posts and one redundancy. This was done without a significant reduction in services. The Panel acknowledged the difficult financial situation that the Council is in and agreed that they will continue to work to identify further savings for 2012/13.



### 3.3 Housing Revenue Account Budget 2011/12

Using the criteria in line with the Communities and Local Government proposals on rent restructuring, average rents will be increased to £84.47 for 2011/12. The actual rise will vary by property, but will amount to an increase of £4.93 pence or 6.2% over the current average. Overall the comparison with other affordable housing; renting in the private sector and mortgage costs shows that the council still provides very good accommodation at a good price.

Whilst the rent increase could potentially mean that more people could become dependent on Housing Benefit, this has to be balanced against the reduction in Government Subsidy level and a corresponding negative impact on the Housing programme of works.

The capital spending power of the Council is limited by the availability of usable capital receipts; the ability to fund capital expenditure from revenue sources (Council Tax, HRA rents and balances); or through the use of borrowing. Whilst the capital programme can be fully funded in 2011/12 this will not be the case for future years. For 2012/2013 either additional funding or a reduction in the proposed programme to the value of £124,000 has to be found. This will rise in 2013/14 to a deficit of £680,000. In the light of the reduced receipts and the statutory nature of the Disabled Facility Grant provision, further consideration needs to be given to how best to fund the Housing capital programme for the medium and long-term.

The Panel supported the measures set out above.

## 4. WORK PROGRAMME

- 4.1 The Panel has an ongoing programme of work of relevant topic areas. A number of complex Government consultation documents have been published during the year and these, together with the current programme have formed the basis of the Panel's work during the year.

## 5. OPPOSITION SPOKESPERSON'S COMMENTS

This year in Housing we have seen highs and lows once again.

The lows include the loss and non replacement of Diana McLean, Strategic Housing Manager, who worked very hard to secure funding for a new development in Pennington, the first Council properties to be built in the District for many years.

Rent rises once again along with benefit cuts - I can envisage many families becoming homeless.

The need for housing - the District has 6,000 families on the waiting list and chasing so few properties. This does not include families that are over-crowded and need to move to larger accommodation.

Loss of wardens for sheltered accommodation and uncertainty.

The highs are that Howards Mead in Pennington properties are still going ahead. Thanks to Javed Ditta, Senior Housing Strategy and Development Officer and his colleagues keeping the pressure up and working very hard.

The disabled facilities waiting list has been reduced and people are now waiting weeks not months for a decision.

Discussions on environmental enhancements to housing stock including solar panels and becoming greener and saving energy. I am also very pleased that our planned maintenance budget is still able to continue with meeting a better homes standard.

**CLlr Mrs M McLean**

## 6. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

The Housing Review Panel has had a very busy year and continues to work hard. The increased numbers of government consultation papers has required a good deal of discussion and consideration by panel members and this has been on top of the "normal" scrutiny of performance and issues that have arisen with service reviews and the like.

The Panel is actively involved with Tenant Representatives who are members of the Panel and the relationship shows many benefits not least a better understanding by local councillors of issues and concerns that tenants have.

The current economic situation continues to be of concern and coupled with the Housing Revenue Account review means that the future is relatively uncertain. The benefit of the work of the Panel including tenant representatives means that we will work together with officers to overcome difficulties that may arise and continue to ensure the efficient and effective provision of housing services.

I would like to thank the councillors on the Panel, tenant representatives and officers for continuing to maintain excellent standards in the current period of change and economic uncertainty.

**Cllr Mrs P Jackman**  
Chairman, Housing Review Panel



## **LEISURE, CULTURE AND YOUTH MATTERS REVIEW PANEL - 2010-11**

### **1. MAJOR AREAS OF INTEREST**

#### **1.1 Support for Arts and Heritage Functions.**

The Panel held a special workshop session, with invited guests from arts and heritage groups that were supported by this Council, to explore whether the outputs and outcomes they provided represented good value for money for the financial support provided.

It was recognised that the Council was often only one of the funding streams on which the organisation depended, but the Council's contribution was nonetheless very important, bearing in mind the tight financial constraints under which the organisations operated. The arts and heritage organisations helped to deliver 2 key priorities in the Corporate Plan, empowering young lives; and valuing and supporting older people. The Panel concluded that the various organisations did represent good value for money and that funding should continue. Under the medium term financial plan the Panel has however accepted that this area of funding should also be reduced, although with some recognition of the value of each organisation to the local community.

#### **1.2 Health Centre Promotion and Marketing**

In the discussion on the Portfolio Plan the Panel identified the need to review the promotion and marketing of the Health and Leisure Centres, and asked for detailed comparative information both between centres and with competitors, and also on trends over recent years.

The Panel considered a very detailed report on this topic at their meeting in March. Following the changes to the structure of the Health and Leisure Centre Management in 2010 the organisation of the marketing and promotion function had also been changed, with much greater co-ordination of corporate initiatives through a central unit, with centre-based teams working on specific elements, relating more to individual

existing and potential customers. The new marketing and promotion structure was proving very effective and even in the currently challenging financial climate, the Health and Leisure Centres were achieving higher than targetted income and containing their marketing costs within budget. The Panel was satisfied that the marketing and promotion campaigns were soundly based and represented good value for money. Good attention was being paid to using more modern forms of contact with customers, such as the website and Facebook, but more traditional forms of contact, for example through centre based focus groups, were still being actively used. Customer satisfaction figures remains extremely high, at an average of 94% and retention levels are much higher than in the private sector, which suggests that the products being offered are of good quality and what the public demand, and also that the pricing structures are correctly thought out.

The Panel identified some areas where they considered there was merit in making greater investment, including the installation of wi-fi in public areas in the health and leisure centres, an Olympic based marketing and promotion campaign, and also the establishment of a more stand alone Health and Leisure website, which would match the flexibility of commercial competitors and also allow bookings and payments to be made on line. They were reassured that these issues had already been identified and work was in hand.

## **2. OTHER ITEMS WHICH WERE CONSIDERED OR WHERE INFORMATION WAS GATHERED.**

### **2.1 Contract Award Procedure**

The Panel evaluated whether the new procedures for managing the preparation and award of contracts over £10,000 in value, known as the Gateway Review, was proving successful. They were reassured that 37 contracts had been awarded under the new procedures and no significant issues had been identified with any of these contracts. The process included the use of pro-formas to assess and sign off each stage of the review process as the contract progressed. Any concerns would be reported to members. The Corporate Overview Panel would be evaluating the operation of the scheme again after a period of operation.

### **2.2 Fees and Charges**

The Panel examined the fees and charges in detail to be satisfied that they were set at the correct level to reflect changes in the market, with private competitors freezing and cutting prices to attract business in the currently tough economic climate.

### **2.3 Dibden Golf Centre Soft marketing Exercise**

In the light of the greater savings that must be achieved under the medium term financial plan, it was decided to take a fundamental look at the operation of Dibden Golf Centre to try to maximise the income from that source. A consultant has been engaged to work with the Council to seek views from competitors in the golfing business and to explore management options. The process is equivalent to that which was undertaken for the Health and Leisure Centres. The Panel are receiving reports as the process develops.

## **3. CALL-IN**

### **3.1 Free Swimming Initiative**

Following the Coalition Government's decision to remove funding for free swimming for under 17 year olds and the over 60's the Portfolio Holder had decided to re-introduce charges for these age groups. The decision was called in by Cllrs D Harrison and Robinson on the grounds that they considered that there had been insufficient exploration of alternative means of maintaining free swimming for these age groups;

and in particular, the Panel had not been consulted to enlist their expertise to find an alternative way forwards to the introduction of charges. The majority of the Members of the Panel supported the Portfolio Holder's decision, being mindful of a previous discussion in which they had decided that, if government funding was withdrawn, the free service would not be able to continue, and also that a high proportion of the existing swimmers had already been users of the pool before charges were removed, and were consequently very likely to continue pool usage.

#### **4. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

##### **4.1 Portfolio Plan and Medium Term Financial Plan**

The Panel, as part of the normal performance review process, examined how well the Council had performed compared to the performance indicators set for 2009/2010. They were particularly pleased to note the success of the INQ youth website, which was achieving double the number of hits per month than projected.

As a consequence of the debate on the Portfolio Plan, the Panel initiated a review of the portfolio budget and asked for additional information to be provided on expenditure within the Portfolio and how well this was being used to meet corporate objectives. Members focussed increasingly on income and expenditure within each of the Health and Leisure Centres; and also the Sports and Community Development and Arts and Heritage budget heads. This process was partially overtaken by the Comprehensive Spending Review and the consequent development within this Council of the medium term financial plan. The specific information requested by the Panel was incorporated into the report that was considered on a corporate basis by all the Panels and Committees, and was used to develop recommendations to the Portfolio Holder. In general terms the Panel accepted the rationale for the cuts that had been suggested.

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

Although the panel has carried out some useful scrutiny work in the past 12 months, it has existed within a culture that sees challenge as a threat. The portfolio holder would do well to see the panel as a resource with members who have something to offer before decisions are made. The decision making process of the authority is likely to be enhanced by more, not less scrutiny

**Cllr D Harrison**

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

All members of the Pane have worked very hard over the past year.

We have met with many of our partners and discussed many subjects.

This report probably brings to an end Leisure as we know it today, but I have every confidence that members will still make every effort to scrutinise in future as in the past.

May I personally thank all members for their support over the past years.

**Cllr J A G Hutchins**

Chairman, Leisure Culture and Youth Matters Panel



# PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION REVIEW PANEL - 2010-11

## 1. MAJOR REVIEWS

### 1.1 Lymington Parking Study

In 2009, the Panel initiated a parking study to ascertain future parking pressures in Lymington and provide suggestions on how these could be met. The Panel felt that this was essential, as adequate customer car parking was vital in maintaining a vibrant, economically active, town centre. At present, all the parking was in use, including parking in side streets around the shopping centre, on Saturdays and during school holidays. The Panel has been involved throughout the process, receiving regular reports and making recommendations to Cabinet where appropriate, which have subsequently been adopted and are being implemented.

An action plan has been agreed by the Cabinet which includes increasing the percentage of spaces dedicated to short stay parking. The thrust of the proposals was to make better use of existing parking facilities, rather than construct more.

The objective was to increase turnover of spaces at the car parks by changing some long stay parking bays to short stay in the Cannon Street Car Park, from the start of the 2011 holiday season, and, subject to experience gained from the Cannon Street measures, similar arrangements at St Thomas Street prior to the 2012 holiday season. Any concerns raised by residents will be closely monitored. Talks were ongoing with interested parties concerning the possibility of parking in the Lymington Town Hall Social Services site on market days. For Saturdays, which are a problem throughout the year, the local Chamber of Trade is looking to come to an agreement which will allow their employees to use other privately owned space close to the Town Centre.

The proposed amendment to the District of New Forest (Off- Street Parking Places) Order to facilitate the change of 47 spaces from long to short stay is currently subject to a statutory consultation process which closes on 9 May 2011. At that time all representations received will be considered by the portfolio holder prior to any final decision being made. A considerable number of representations have been received to date.

## **1.2 Local Development Framework / Sites and Development Management Development Plan Document**

The Panel has been monitoring the progress of the Local Development Framework, and has considered proposed development management policies and site-specific proposals.

Informal area-based meetings have been held with members, the views from which informed the document, which was considered at a special meeting of the Review Panel and the Planning Development Control Committee in November with all other members of the Council being invited. Subject to a number of suggested amendments, the joint meeting unanimously supported the document to go forward for public consultation.

In the year, three related Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's) have been adopted: the New Milton Local Distinctiveness Document, the Lymington Local Distinctiveness Document (see 1.4 below); and the Ringwood Town Access Plan, which has been prepared jointly with Hampshire County Council, and Ringwood Town Council. Also, the first local workshop was held in Ringwood on 9 March for the Local Distinctiveness SPD with many interested community groups attending together with officers and local Members.

The consultation period on Sites and Development Management DPD Public Consultation Document ended on 11 March. In total, over 1000 people attended the nine public consultation events held across the District in February.

## **1.3 Lymington Local Distinctiveness Supplementary Planning Document**

A key feature of the Panel's work this year has been the consideration and input into the Lymington Local Distinctiveness Supplementary Planning Document. This is a major document that gives detailed guidance on the design criteria for the town.

Representatives from Lymington and Pennington Town Council and the Lymington Society were engaged in the process, attended the Panel meeting when it was discussed, and were supportive of the end product. Local District councillors were in support of the document.

Members felt it was an excellent, succinct, user friendly document that would provide a valuable framework for the protection of the character of Lymington and would also be helpful in public inquiries and appeals. The SPD was adopted by Cabinet in February 2011 and is now in force as planning policy.

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

### **2.1 Planning Reform**

The Panel received a briefing on anticipated reform of planning legislation, much of which was being introduced in the Localism Bill. It is an extremely significant piece of legislation which looks to devolve decision-making powers from Whitehall to communities and their local democratically-elected representatives. It is likely to result in some very significant changes to the planning system at all levels.

The Bill's numerous proposals included the abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies, the use of the Community Infrastructure Levy, new powers for neighbourhood planning, and new rules for nationally-significant infrastructure projects. Measures included:

- Abolition of the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) and reform of major infrastructure decision making
- Abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies / Strategic planning / Creation of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP) (to replace Regional Development Agencies)
- National Planning Framework (NPF)
- Incentives

- Streamlining the Local Development Framework (LDF)
- Neighbourhood planning
- Planning policy statements (PPS)
- Planning application and appeal reform
- Planning fees

## **2.2 Community Infrastructure Levy**

The Panel considered the implications for the Council of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

The CIL was a new planning charge on developments which came into force on 6 April 2010 under the previous Government. As the adoption of CIL was optional, it was decided to defer consideration of whether NFDC should implement CIL until the new Government had made their intentions clear. In November 2010, the Government published new guidance on the CIL, which indicated the intention to retain CIL but with some simplification of the procedures for its introduction.

From 2014, scope to obtain developers' contributions under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 will be limited. The CIL allows authorities to obtain contributions for a wider range of purposes for all development above a minimal size. A lot of work is needed by the Council to set charging structure having regard to type, size and location of development. The draft charging structure will be subject to significant statutory consultation, and will need to go through a public examination overseen by an inspector (now called an Examiner). Clarification was required on the 'meaningful proportion' of contributions that should be passed on to the local community.

The Panel has been advised that the new CIL legislation was unlikely to affect monies already collected under existing Section 106 Agreements.

The Panel was supportive of moving to the CIL as soon as practicable as this should increase the monies available for use within the District.

## **2.3 Consultation Document: Have Your Say on Planning for Hampshire's Minerals and Waste**

The Panel has considered a consultation document titled 'Have Your Say on Planning for Hampshire's Minerals and Waste', produced by Hampshire County Council (HCC), Portsmouth and Southampton City Councils, the New Forest and South Downs National Parks (the Minerals Planning Authorities). It sets out draft proposals for the future supply of minerals and waste facilities over the next 20 years up to 2030. The Panel considered sites identified in the New Forest District.

In general, the Panel supported the officers' recommendations for all of the sites, though they asked for stronger emphasis of certain points and additional grounds for objections at various locations, which have been communicated to the Cabinet.

## **2.4 Vacancy Rates in Commercial Centres**

The Panel noted the annual report on shop and other commercial premises vacancies in main centres in the District.

## **2.5 Granting of Licences to Provide a Car Washing Service in Council Car Parks**

The Panel has considered and approved the principle of permitting car washing companies to operate in Council car parks.

## **2.6 Concessionary Fares Funding for Young People**

The Panel noted the latest position with regard to changes in concessionary fare



funding for young people. The total budget for 2010/11 was £51,770 against the anticipated outturn of £43,378. The scheme was therefore expected to run well within budget, following the Council's decision to work in partnership with the Hampshire Youth Service, the Handy Trust, "Its Your Choice", and Connections. Only these organisations, who were well placed to reach young people with transport related problems, were permitted to distribute application forms. Applicants were now being asked to explain the transport problems they were experiencing on a modified application form. As a result, it was hoped this approach would help tackle transport poverty in a more efficient way.

## **2.7 Loss of Government Funding Streams / Budget Issues**

The Panel was advised that the Government was withdrawing the Planning and Housing Delivery Grant, which in recent years had been worth up to £400,000 per annum to this Council. In the last financial year the budget had allowed for a grant of £120,000, but it had been anticipated for some time that this grant may reduce or cease. Internal measures allowed the organisation to accommodate this reduction.

## **2.8 Street Lighting PFI Update**

The Panel received a very interesting presentation from Julian Higgins, Street Lighting Policy and Conservation Manager, Hampshire County Council, who gave a presentation on the implications of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) for street lighting in the District and the wider area. (Members can find the Powerpoint slides from the presentation on the Councillors' Area at the following link:

Street Lighting PFI 2010-2035.

The County Council is managing what was the largest street lighting PFI in Europe, involving £225 million in Investment for a 25 year contract which would include a five year core investment period. The scheme would bring an estimated £100,000 per annum saving for New Forest District Council. 136,000 street lights and illuminated signs etc. would be replaced over the five year period. Two street lighting columns would be replaced on average every hour for five years.

The project was necessary as the current street lighting stock was 40-50 years old and much of it was becoming structurally unsound.

The project was being managed in collaboration with 66 partner authorities. The work was being phased across Hampshire. The logistics of the project meant that certain parts of the New Forest District would be done some time before other parts; it was not being organised on a district by district basis.

Sympathetic lighting in areas of special character, e.g. Lymington was being used and would be in keeping with the area or would be similar to existing stock. It was an innovative project, with solar power being used where possible. The orange sodium lights would be replaced with improved lighting which would assist with crime reduction and road safety which it was hoped would make residents feel safer.

From an environmental standpoint, the lights offered reduced light pollution and would lead to reduced carbon emissions.

## **2.9 Enforcement Team**

In June 2008 the Panel recommended that the staffing resource within the Planning Enforcement team be increased in order to meet workload demands, bring about general service improvements and increase more proactive on-site monitoring. The Panel recently requested an update on the current situation.

For various reasons the workforce had fluctuated over the last few years but was now up to full strength. The staffing difficulties were understood, and Members were supportive of the work of the team, which was often very high-profile. The Panel requested that a more selective prioritisation scheme be introduced.

## **2.10 Annual monitoring report**

The Panel received a summary of the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) for 2010. The AMR was a statutory document and looked at the Council's Performance relating to the New Forest District Local Plan and the Local Development Framework.

## **2.11 Concessionary Travel – Transfer to Hampshire County Council**

The Panel has been keeping abreast of developments in respect of the transfer of responsibility for Concessionary Travel from the District Council to the County Council.

Hampshire County Council has created a uniform scheme across Hampshire. The scheme will provide off-peak travel from 9.00am, instead of the Government proposed 9.30am. However, funding did not enable HCC to match the all day scheme previously provided by NFDC. There would be no concession for Hythe Ferries, or any ferries in the County. There was more of an emphasis on additional provision for disabled users in terms of a 'Companion' pass. Elderly NFDC residents currently in receipt of certain benefits received £40 per annum in travel vouchers, which was being withdrawn under the HCC scheme. It was felt that, given the higher proportion of elderly residents in the New Forest, this area was the biggest loser as a result of this change, and District Members had lobbied HCC accordingly.

## **3. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

### **3.1 Portfolio Plans – Looking Back at 2009/10 and Performance Indicators**

The Panel noted that market-related Planning income had begun to improve from the very low levels experienced, and with reduced staffing levels, it had still been possible to achieve most portfolio targets.

Of particular note was the adoption of our Planning Core Strategy. This was made possible following the rigorous public examination earlier in the year. The Inspector supported all of the Council's main objectives. This enabled NFDC to become the first authority in Hampshire to adopt such a strategy and secure a sound legal basis for future planning decisions.

Other major achievements included completing the Lymington Parking Study, the production of the Council's first local distinctiveness study (for New Milton) and implementing a number of new procedures required by changes in development control legislation and practice. Work commenced on the Council's Sites and Development Management proposed planning document.

Traffic management agency work brought to fruition a number of locally important small scale schemes, and programmed deployment of traffic speed indicator and reminder devices aimed to assist the prevention of speeding in targeted locations. Work commenced on identifying suitable and deliverable cycling and walking route enhancements throughout our district, with the aim of providing healthy and environmentally friendly alternatives to the use of cars.

### **3.2 Medium Term Financial Plan 2011/2012**

The Panel considered and recommended for approval, the proposed Medium Term Financial Plan for 2011/2012. This included a number of quantified savings and efficiencies for 2011/12 as well as various workstreams, including planned future reviews.

There was an ongoing process of continuous review involving all aspects of the Portfolio. Emerging savings opportunities would be examined and implemented as soon as practicable. Items with long term implications would be given particularly careful consideration.

Members were satisfied with the overall approach and were supportive of proposals for potential collaboration and joint working with other bodies, where this was in the best interests of the Council.

#### **4. PORTFOLIO HOLDER INPUT**

- 4.1** The Planning and Transportation Portfolio holder, Cllr Treleaven, has regularly attended Panel meetings and updated the Panel on various issues and meetings he has attended. At the March 2011 Panel meeting, the last before the election, Cllr Treleaven thanked the Chairman, Panel members, and officers for their assistance and constructive contributions to the work of the portfolio. Similarly, all members agreed that the relationship between the Panel and the Portfolio holder had been very open, positive and productive.

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

- 5.1** The Panel had an extremely busy year during 2010/11 with a number of major issues to consider. Work on the Local Development Framework program continued with a major review of all potential development sites in the District area widespread consultation took place during the first ¼ of 2011 on possible sites and development management policies that could be included in the Sites and Development Management Development Plan Document. A final document will be put to Cabinet later this year before the proposal goes to a formal Examination in Public. Following the adoption of the Local Distinctiveness study for New Milton, a similar document was prepared and adopted for Lymington. An equivalent study is now taking place on Ringwood. These documents form part of our Planning Policies and have already been instrumental in preventing further unsuitable development taking place. It is expected that developers will now be able to submit more appropriate plans when they first put in an application.
- 5.2** A lengthy study of the limited car parking in Lymington on Saturdays and school holidays concluded that multi-storey car parks and 'park and ride' were not currently appropriate or cost effective. The focus is now on making better use of existing space by re-designating some long stay places for short stay usage. This is being done with the support of the local Chamber of Trade. For Saturdays, which are a problem throughout the year, the local Chamber of Trade is looking to come to an agreement which will allow their employees to use other privately owned space close to the Town Centre.
- 5.3** As this is the end of my 4 year term as Chairman, I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Panel secretary, the Members, Officers and Portfolio Holder for their constructive contributions to the Panel business over the period.

**Cllr F P Vickers**

Chairman, Planning and Transportation Review Panel