

Annual Report of the Overview & Scrutiny Panels 2012/13

www.newforest.gov.uk



Annual Report of the Overview & Scrutiny Panels 2012/13

Welcome to the annual scrutiny report for 2012/13

The past year has seen many changes and continued pressures on local government, with reductions in government funding and the introduction of new legislation that impacts on our work and service delivery. The Council has responded well to these changes in a variety of ways, including placing greater emphasis on the role of scrutiny to help target available resources effectively so that we can continue to provide high quality services to our residents. A feature over recent years has been the increased use of Task and Finish Groups to undertake in-depth reviews on various topics, culminating in recommendations to the relevant Portfolio Holder or the Cabinet.

The Panels have sought to work collaboratively with individual Portfolio Holders and the Cabinet in setting their work programmes but have also looked at areas and issues on their own initiative. Details of councillors who participated in this year's Task and Finish Groups can be found on page 6.

The following pages highlight some of the key activities that have taken place during the year across the Council's three overview and scrutiny panels.

If you would like to see further details of the work of each of the Panels and all of the topics that the Panels have reviewed, please visit the Council's website at www.newforest.gov.uk

Community Overview & Scrutiny Panel

P Jackman (Ch)
S P Davies (V/Ch)
J E Binns
D A Britton
P J Lovelace
B D Lucas
A D O'Sullivan
D J Russell
M S Wade

Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Panel

J G Ward (Ch)
A Rostand (V/Ch)
A R Alvey
M R Harris
J D Heron
M J Kendal
M J Robinson
A R Tinsley
D B Tipp
P A Wyeth

Environment Overview & Scrutiny Panel

L C Ford (Ch)
W S Rippon-Swaine (V/Ch)
D E Andrews
R Bellows
S M Bennison
S J Clarke
W H Dow
A T Glass
M McLean
M D Southgate



Community Overview & Scrutiny Panel



Responsibility for scrutiny of the following portfolios:

- Health and Leisure
- Housing and Communities

Over the last 12 months various legislative changes affecting the remit of the Panel have driven the work of the Panel.

The Localism Act 2011 brought about many changes to housing legislation. These included significant reform of housing finance, housing allocations and tenancy management. The Panel, through regular discussions with the Portfolio Holder and officers has monitored the performance of the housing service to ensure that it has responded well to these changes.

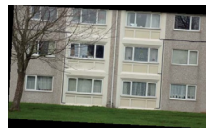
The Panel has continued to review progress on implementing the Housing Strategy following the significant changes to housing finance last year. One of the main priorities for the revised housing strategy is to tackle housing need within the District and includes a major programme of investment in affordable housing. In September the Panel was pleased that real progress had been made with the investment programme. In particular, 29 properties had or were being purchased on the open market.

The real success story of the Council's housing investment programme was the refurbishment of housing at the North Milton Estate. Investment of £6.8million brought 82 houses and 132 flats on the Estate up to the Government's Decent Homes Standard. The Panel was able to support the improvements to the estate by requesting regular updates and close liaison with Tenants' Representatives. The Panel was pleased to hear through its Tenants' Representatives that the estate now has a new lease of life, with a vibrant atmosphere and improved sense of community.

Tenant Representatives continue to contribute to the work of the Panel, not only by expressing views in debate and sitting on Task & Finish Groups, but also by presenting recommendations to the Panel. Their suggestions and findings regarding communication with tenants in sheltered housing, and the introduction of notice boards and information packs were taken forward by officers.

Thank you...

...to both Portfolio Holders and the Tenant Representatives for regularly attending Panel meetings. Your contributions are very much appreciated.



Flats on the North Milton Estate before refurbishment



Flats on the North Milton Estate after refurbishment

Task & Finish Groups

Task & Finish Group review work remains a key area of scrutiny activity where councillors can really get to understand an issue in detail and arrive at recommendations for improvement. Last year saw the completion of several reviews including Section 106 and Domestic Homicide. The Community Alarms & Out of Hours Group, established to review both of these services is progressing well and hope to make recommendations to the Cabinet in the summer.

Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Responsibility for scrutiny of the following portfolios:

- Leader
- Finance and Efficiency



Main reviews in 2012/13

Procurement - A task and Finish Group reviewed and recommended a proposed Procurement Strategy for 2012-2016, which the Panel recommended to the Cabinet and which was adopted. £67m is being spent annually by the Council on goods and services, so effective Procurement is a significant issue for the Authority. Feedback received indicated that private sector organisations appreciate the Council was doing its best for business, though there was a balance to be struck between achieving economies of scale and ensuring there were opportunities for local / small businesses. The Panel has recently considered a Procurement Guide which included changes to the Council's procurement rules, policies, regulations and contract standing orders. The project involved compiling and updating numerous regulations, procedures, rules, thresholds, delegations, and standing orders into one definitive document. The Panel recommended its approval.

Localisation of Council Tax Support - To implement a local council tax reduction scheme in April 2013, the council needed to prepare a scheme and consult on it with the major precepting authorities (County Council, Police and Fire Services), taxpayers and claimants as well as Parish and Town Councils. In order to deliver a scheme within the government's timetable, the Cabinet established a Task & Finish group to undertake this review. The Group met several times throughout the latter half of 2012 and considered the issue in detail. Deliberations included detailed and complex calculations, consultation with local residents, and

comparisons with other local authorities. The scheme agreed by the Council for 2014/15 and future years is based on the Task and Finish Group recommendations. This was against a background of repeated changes in Government guidance.

Budget - In the autumn of 2012 the Budget Task & Finish Group met a number of times to consider the budget for 2013/14 and beyond. The Task & Finish Group met with all Portfolio Holders to gain a better understanding of their plans for developing services during these challenging times. Given the lateness and uncertainty of the Government settlement announcement and constantly changing scenarios, the Task and Finish Group found it very difficult to contribute in a meaningful way to the development of the budget that was subsequently agreed by the Council. A decision was thereafter taken to draw a line under the process for this year. The Panel will be appointing a Group to look at the budget again this year.

ICT Strategy - The Panel has reviewed progress on the implementation of the 2009-13 ICT Strategy. This included progress on projects, the benefits achieved from them, and the future direction for investment. An ICT strategy for 2014 to 2018 will be produced in consultation with members. In addition to this work, two standing ICT groups operate under the Panel: the ICT Investment Panel (Dragon's Den), and the Members' ICT Panel.

Environment Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Responsibility for scrutiny of the following portfolios:

- Environment
 - Planning and Transportation
-



Car Parking Charges – the Panel appointed a Task and Finish Working Group to look at three issues relating to car parking charges. The Task and Finish Working Group undertook extensive research on each of the three topics, leading to the development of recommendations. As a result all year round charging has been introduced in the amenity car parks; a solution has been found for the car parks where historically no charges had been levied so that, in future, they will not generate a net loss against the Council's budgets; and the decision has been taken to initiate an amendment to the Council's Off Street Parking Places Order to introduce charges for Blue Badge holders. As a result of the charges in amenity car parks and the work on car parks where there were historically no charges, additional income or savings of some £60,000 per annum has been achieved.

Kerbside Collection of Glass for Recycling

– the Panel appointed a Task and Finish Working Group to work with the Portfolio Holder to prepare a bid for government funding to allow the introduction of the kerbside collection of glass. The bid, for £1.88 million, was successful and will fund the vehicles and householder storage boxes, as well as the running costs for the first 3 years. The Task and Finish Working Group assisted with the evaluation of various options that meant that the proposal put forwards was soundly based and deliverable. The first collection rounds will be introduced later this year, with all domestic properties receiving a fortnightly collection service, hopefully by the end of this year.

Planning Policy Documents – working with the Planning Development Control Committee and the Portfolio Holder, the Panel has considered and commented upon various planning policy documents that have been progressing through consultation, publication and Examination stages this year. The Sites and Development Management Development Plan Document, Community Infrastructure Levy Scheme and Ringwood Local Distinctiveness Supplementary Planning Document are all progressing well, although the Examination into the first 2 documents has been delayed by causes outside the control of this Authority. The Panel maintained a watching brief during the period of delay.

Community Toilets Scheme – Following a presentation to the Panel by the Chairman of New Forest Access to All, the Panel recognised that there was a shortage of toilets for use by the public, particularly in the north of the District where the Forestry Commission had closed 3 of their public conveniences. The Panel asked that the issue should be discussed with the Forestry Commission and the National Park Authority. This has happened but, sadly, no resolution to this issue can currently be identified. All three organisations are concentrating their limited resources on maintaining existing infrastructure. There are no resources available to provide new conveniences or to directly fund the Community Toilets Scheme.

The organisations will continue to provide assistance to promote the scheme.



Other issues on which the Panel have maintained a watching brief:

Land drainage – the development of a joint working arrangement that uses expertise in this Council to meet the County Council’s statutory duties under the Flood and Water Management legislation.

Sustainability – following the completion of the Green Audit, the Panel receives regular reports on the Council’s activities in seeking energy/CO2 savings. A key success over the last year has been the installation of the photovoltaic panels at Appletree Court and the Town Hall, which are generating income through the Feed In Tariff in accordance with the projected business model.

Home Energy Conservation Act – The Panel looks at the HECA report which now has to be published, setting out the measures that the Council proposes to take to improve the energy efficiency of the domestic housing stock in the District.

Call In

The proposal to introduce charges for the Rumbridge Street, Totton car park generated significant local concerns, which intensified after revised proposals were developed to address concerns raised in the public consultation period. The Portfolio Holder’s decision was consequently called in. The Panel was satisfied that the decision was within policy and budget, but asked to receive an update after 6 months of charging. At the 6 months review they were pleased to note that the anticipated problems had not occurred and that income generation from the Totton car parks was on target.

This year's task and finish working groups

Community Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Domestic Homicide Review

Cllrs Clarke, Lovelace,
Penman and M S Wade

Community Alarms & Out of Hours

Cllrs Beck, Davies, Lovelace,
Penwarden, Sevier and
G Waters (Tenant Rep)

Environment Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Parking Task and Finish Working Group

Cllrs Clarke, Glass;
Southgate; Beck

Glass Recycling Task and Finish Working Group

Cllrs Bellows, Bennison,
Dow, Ford, C J Harrison
and Woods

Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Localisation of Council Tax Support

Cllrs Beck, Bellows,
C J Harrison, J D Heron,
C Ward and J G Ward

Budget

Cllrs Alvey, J D Heron,
Robinson, Tipp, C Ward and
J G Ward

Equalities

Cllrs Glass, Hoare
and Robinson

Work Programmes

All three Overview & Scrutiny Panels have developed their work programmes for 2013/14. A selection of future projects is set out below.

Community Overview & Scrutiny Panel

- Night Shelter
- Community Covenant
- Empty Homes
- Car Crime and Metal Theft
- Dibden Golf Centre - Progress

Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Panel

- Further work on Localisation of Council Tax Support
- Discretionary Rate Relief
- Long Term Empty Properties
- The Council's Approach to Economic Growth
- Reduction the number of NFDC Elected Members
- Budget

Environment Overview & Scrutiny Panel

- Alternative Fuelled Vehicles
 - Car-Parking On-Street Enforcement
 - Waste Strategy
 - Green Infrastructure & Open Space Strategy
 - Climate Local
 - Food Hygiene Rating Scheme
 - Keyhaven Mooring Agreement
-

Contact Us ...if you would like to know more about the work of each of the panels please contact the Committee Administrator below

Community Panel – melanie.stephens@nfdc.gov.uk

Corporate Panel – andy.rogers@nfdc.gov.uk

Environment Panel – jan.debnam@nfdc.gov.uk