New Forest
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Dear Councillor

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL - THURSDAY, 21 NOVEMBER 2019

Please find attached, for consideration at the meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel on Thursday, 21 November 2019, the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

Please bring this document with you to the meeting.

Agenda No   Item

8.   **Budget Task and Finish Group Report** (Pages 3 - 10)

To receive the report of the Budget Task and Finish Group.

9.   **Economic Development/High Streets** (Pages 11 - 24)

To receive an update on Economic Development in town centres, and related issues.

Yours sincerely

Bob Jackson
Chief Executive

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CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL – 21 NOVEMBER 2019

BUDGET TASK AND FINISH GROUP – FINAL REPORT

1. PURPOSE

1.1 The Budget Task & Finish Group has, on behalf of all members, explored and reviewed the Council's plans for each portfolio. This report presents the findings of the Group to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel for consideration.

2. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for the Budget Task and Finish Group are:

(1) To review the Budget Strategy and its implications for the broader community of the New Forest; and

(2) To report the outcome of this review to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel to assist in responding to the budget proposals for 2019 and beyond.

Membership of Group

Cllr A Alvey
Cllr G Blunden
Cllr R Clark
Cllr K Craze
Cllr P Dowd
Cllr M Levitt
Cllr A E McEvoy
Cllr A O'Sullivan (Chairman)
Cllr J Reilly
Cllr A Sevier

The Work of the Group

2.1 At their first meeting it was agreed that the task should again involve a review of performance, as well as meetings with Portfolio Holders. The overriding theme was one of scrutiny and assurance on behalf of all members of the Council and the public they serve.

2.2 To assist members of the task and finish group, detailed Resource Plans for each Portfolio were developed with Portfolio Holders and Service Managers, and provided to the Group.

2.3 Each Portfolio Resource Plan included:

- Medium Term Financial Plan - 2019 Onwards
- Position Statement for each Portfolio
- Summary Risk Register by Portfolio
- Performance Scorecard by Portfolio
- Summary Budget for each portfolio

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2.3 The Group found these very useful and reviewed these before meeting with each Cabinet Member. This provided a thorough review of the challenges on key issues for the Portfolio. As part of their research, group members asked a wide range of detailed questions.

2.4 The Group were pleased that considerable progress had been made on several of the recommendations from last year, and noted that updates had been reported through the relevant overview and scrutiny panels. It would still like to see future progress reports on those issues not yet pursued.

3. FINDINGS OF THE TASK & FINISH GROUP

Generic and tailored questions were asked to each Portfolio Holder. The generic questions were as follows:

1. What challenges and key actions are emerging within your Portfolio over the next few years and how will you address them within current financial constraints?

2. What further work could be done to secure your portfolio's sustainability? Please give examples, including the identification of new revenue income streams and opportunities to bid for and utilise one-off funding from external sources.

3. To what extent does your portfolio look at best practice and innovation in local government elsewhere, to boost its performance?

4. How are you securing best value for money with the services within your portfolio, whilst maximising opportunities for partnership agreements / collaboration?

5. We have noted that in some Portfolios there is a concern over a skills shortage.

   a. Could you confirm the effects on your budget and how are you addressing these?
   b. What opportunities have been considered to buy-in services from outside the Council?

A selection of issues discussed from each portfolio is highlighted below.

3.1 Planning and Infrastructure Portfolio

Members were pleased to see that the Building Control Service was showing improved income and hoped this trend would continue.

The Group would encourage the Council to further maximise its Pre - Applications Income and raise awareness among business that this service is available, and the overall benefits.

The Members noted that the Trees and Conservation services have been brought back in house, but in a cost neutral way.

The Group were mindful of the potential for a fluctuating workload of planning staff in connection with the local plan, and query whether sharing staff with other authorities to deal with workload peaks and troughs has been considered.

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Action to follow up: Examine the possibility of sharing staff with other authorities to deal with workload peaks and troughs.

3.2 Environment and Regulatory Services Portfolio

The group were concerned to note the potential financial impact as a result of the proposed changes to recycling payments and contamination charges put forward recently by HCC, which could have an implication of circa£750,000 on the Council's General Fund budget. The Group hoped would encourage the two authorities to work together to reduce this cost.

The Group would like to see if more could be done to support schools and elsewhere regarding communications on recycling and litter, and that this communications work be properly resourced. Clear and concise communications to the public on recycling were essential.

The Group was pleased to see that the Pest Control service was now budgeted to break even and looked forward to seeing this continue to move in the right direction.

It was noted that originally the glass collection vehicles were funded from Government grant and a replacement programme should be in place. The Group note the increased cost of glass collections, and query whether new avenues of income (eg pubs etc), might be viable. The increased cost had improved glass tonnage now being recycled.

Following the recent £25k grant for coastal works the Group suggest that efforts be made to obtain further funding.

Action to follow up: Increase communications on recycling, including to schools, keeping the message to the wider public as clear and concise as possible.

Action to follow up: Continue to explore all options to secure third party funding

3.3 Community Affairs Portfolio

The Group noted that some activities falling within the Community Affairs portfolio were funded directly from Central Government (e.g., the Supported Families programme (formerly Troubled Families)). Given the perceived benefits of the Programme, and that it was unclear whether it would be funded beyond 2020, it was suggested the Community Panel assess how the Council might respond to a withdrawal of Government funding, including whether there were ways of continuing the Programme inhouse, perhaps through using existing, related resources in Housing, or other resources elsewhere.

It was further suggested that a full breakdown of the external and internal funding for this Portfolio be made available to the Community Panel to ensure members have a complete picture of the Portfolio functions and related funding.

On Customer Services, the Group again emphasised the importance of the development of the new website as a central part of the new customer service strategy, and the need to maximise the benefits for customers and the council, while retaining traditional (e.g. face to face) communications for those who still need it.

The Group welcomed the combined CCTV / Appletree Careline service and encourage the service to look for more income streams, such as advertising in local hospitals

within the District as well as further afield. There should also be checks that the promotional film for Appletree Careline was being shown in doctor's surgeries as arranged.

The Group felt that advertising / public communications should be increased across the portfolio, given the potential income benefits.

It was also felt that the Community Grants fund could be better publicised and that NFDC's contribution be acknowledged in recipients' communication material.

Action to follow up: Breakdown of internal and external funding to be brought to the Community panel, in light of the potential withdrawal of funding beyond 2020.

Action to follow up: Continue to explore all advertising avenues for Carelines, including local hospitals.

Action to follow up: Review the advertising of community grants to ensure a range of organisations are aware of this annual process.

3.4 Local Economic Development, Property and Innovation Portfolio

Given that this Portfolio was primarily focussed on business growth through helping external organisations, the Group explored the direct and indirect benefits to the Council, business, and community.

The Group felt there should be a better evidence base to show the benefits of the Portfolio's work, with better targets, clearer objectives to measure achievements, and a different mix of activities.

The group felt that greater contact could be made with the 8,000 businesses in the District, and were informed of an aim to implement a new website and app. The Group were supportive of the Portfolio Holder engaging with ICT on the development of a Business Case to request the required funding to implement this. Whilst the Group heard that the Portfolio's work indirectly led to increased Business Rates for the Council, it was pointed out that this was only the case where new businesses were brought into the area, although it was acknowledged that Council intervention and assistance might also help businesses to stay in the District.

The Group were supportive of ongoing efforts to pursue and encourage Broadband and mobile signal provision in the Forest, given the strong business and resident need.

The Group suggest that the quality of service provided by the Council could be measured by doing a survey among local business contacts to measure the value they place on the council's work in this area. The results of this survey to be reported to COSP.

Action to follow up: Develop the performance scorecard for the Portfolio to better represent the objectives and measurable achievements.

Action to follow up: Continue to drive forward the provision of broadband and mobile data and follow up through the scrutiny panel as appropriate.

Action to follow up: Develop a business case for a new business orientated website/app

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3.5 Finance, Corporate Services and Improvement Portfolio

The Group support the delivery of commercial property investment, noting the relatively modest projects to date, also noting that no external borrowing is required in the short-medium term.

Concern was expressed at the apparent delay in the Police moving to Lymington Town Hall, and members urged the portfolio holder to bring the project to fruition.

The Group note the on-going project to implement the new Financial system and look forward to the benefits it will bring.

The Group welcome the move towards paperless working and expect this to extend across the council.

Members acknowledged that the Council's continual development was heavily reliant on the progress of its ICT projects, for example, the new website, Office 365, the new telephony system, and software upgrades. The delay with the self-serve kiosks at the Health & Leisure centres was one example where the crystallisation of operational savings might be affected by such delays. The Group emphasised the need for the recruitment and retention of good ICT project managers to expedite projects and ensure their success.

The Group notes the continued pressure on car parking at ATC and welcome the roll-out of ICT projects to further enable remote and flexible working.

Action to follow up: Secure the Police tenancy at the Town Hall, or re-advertise this space for an alternative tenant.

Action to follow up: Ensure the resource is in place to deliver the variety of necessary ICT projects

3.6 Leader and Corporate Affairs Portfolio

The Group were pleased to see the draft Corporate Plan submitted to Cabinet and welcomed its content.

A number of issues were raised involving human resources in the Council. These were:

- Recruitment difficulties – this varied in pockets across the Council.
- The need for regular staff surveys, to see trends, gather ideas and improve outcomes
- Suggestion that Exit interviews be collated and reported.
- Online learning for staff - how do we ensure this is effective when compared to other modes of training, such as team building.
- Setting targets for growth of apprenticeships over future years

LEP Projects – the Group were very keen that the Council should do its upmost to secure as much funding as it could for the local area in the form of ambitious and specific projects. It suggested that a list of specific detailed projects be drawn up for submission to the LEP and that these be pursued in consultation with the relevant O&S Panel.

NPA Partnership working – the Leader and all portfolio holders are encouraged to make further efforts to expand partnership working and joint service provision with the NPA, so as to realise the obvious organisational benefits to the Council and the local community.

Action to follow up: Encourage specific projects to be submitted to the LEP to deliver valuable external funding to the District.

3.7 Housing Services Portfolio

The Group felt that progress in Housing over recent times had been very positive, with a fundamental transformation of the service in the last 18 months and the introduction of new systems, procedures and policies. The Group wished to congratulate the portfolio holder and lead officers for their efforts in achieving this, with noticeable enthusiasm and drive.

The Group noted that there had been few targets included on the Housing Portfolio score sheet, and had enquired about future performance benchmarking including or best practice comparators against other authorities. It was pleased to see that the Service was developing a new performance framework to capture key operational performance indicators across all functions in the Housing Service, and it was anticipated that the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Panel would be receiving regular updates in this regard. It further noted that there would be additional targets set under the performance management framework of the new corporate plan.

Members were interested to see the effects of the introduction of the new allocations policy in the New Year.

Members queried whether there was a Strategy in place to deal with potential increases in tenancy arrears arising from the introduction of Universal Credit.

Action to follow up: Develop the new performance framework and key performance indicators including the additional targets to monitor success as against the objectives of the current housing strategy.

3.8 Leisure and Wellbeing Portfolio

The Group was mindful of the ongoing process to identify a preferred partner to operate the Council's 5 Health and Leisure Centres.

Members felt that the Dibden Golf Course was a good example of collaborative working with external partners, and it was hoped that experience gained from this would prove useful in developing a good relationship with any prospective Leisure centre operator.

The Group hoped that, where the Leisure Centres had local competition, the Council owned centres could react quickly to new initiatives and stay competitive.

Members also suggested that approaches should be made to local schools and colleges to forge a link between them and the leisure centres, to encourage apprenticeships or similar training for the development of good staff.

The Group noted the delay in introducing the self-serve kiosks in Leisure Centres, and felt it important to expedite the matter.

The Group commented that having now completed the Eling Experience project, it would encourage a review of the arrangements with the Town Council.
Action to follow up: Consider closer working with schools and colleges in order to encourage Leisure based apprenticeships or similar training

Action to follow up: Review the arrangements with the Town Council on the operation of the 'Eling Experience'

4.   CONCLUSIONS / GROUP COMMENTS

4.1   Overall the Group was again impressed with the depth and breadth of knowledge of the Portfolio Holders and were grateful to them for their support and engagement in this process. Common themes this year are staff recruitment and retention difficulties, the need for improved communications on such issues as waste recycling and business marketing, the continued need to innovate in income generation, and a greater focus on performance monitoring.

4.2   The Group again would wish to emphasise the importance of the website upgrade and other ICT projects and the many efficiencies across the Council which depend upon the success of these projects, and that these be efficiently managed.

4.3   The Group reiterates the need for continued impetus to drive forward partnership/collaborative working with neighbouring councils and partner organisations.

4.4   The Group would also like the Council to address known areas where skill shortages are visible e.g. HGV Drivers. In some instances, these will be addressed through a review of our pay as against the market, but also through encouraging the next generation of potential employees through engagement with schools and colleges.

4.5   Finally, the Group is mindful that many of its comments or suggestions are not directly related to detailed 'budget' considerations, but are more about business / corporate strategy. It would welcome feedback from EMT, the Cabinet and others about the usefulness of the exercise and how it might improve, the future direction of the group, the methods used to carry out its work, and the timing and timescale. It requests that feedback be given in the form of a report to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

5.   RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1   That the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panels be given regular updates on progress with the actions and matters highlighted throughout this report.

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CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL – 21 NOVEMBER 2019

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – TOWN CENTRES

1. RECOMMENDATION

1.1 That the content of the report be noted.

2. THE PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

2.1 To set out issues facing Town centres and the High Street and identify the national picture for members consideration.

3. BACKGROUND

The national picture

3.1 The future of the High Street has been a matter of great debate at a national level for some years. The traditional concept of the High Street has come under question with the growth of on-line shopping, the rising cost of delivering retail through High Street shops and changes in the way people choose to spend both leisure time and income.

3.2 About 16% of the British population live within 200 metres of a High Street. More than half of UK high street addresses are residential, and between 2012-2017 there was growth in the number of **businesses** on our High Streets (15% growth), however **retail** uses fell to 25% (from 29%) of all High Street businesses; they are increasingly moving away from High Streets. Between 2012 and 2017, employment on High Streets in the accommodation and food sector increased by over 20% in every county and region.

3.3 Several national trends have become very clear in recent years. There have been falls in retail floorspace (empty shops and/or often too big for the larger established brands), falls in rateable value, and falls in council income from business rates. In addition there are falling numbers in the footfall of people visiting high streets (£1 in every £5 is spent online). This also has had repercussions for retail jobs - between 2016-2019 around 106,000 according to British Retail Consortium. The loss of retail jobs is predicted to worsen, with up to 900,000 fewer jobs over the next decade. Allied to the changes noted above, there have been rising costs for high street retailers (business rates, wage rises, and rents).

3.4 Amongst the sectors with the largest number of store openings are takeaways, gyms, convenience stores, and charity shops. We are seeing a move away from traditional retailing. With regard to supermarket brands, Aldi and Lidl are the brands that continue to open new stores.

3.5 Recent studies show that there are a number of factors that govern town centre success:
   1. Activity hours (activities open after 5pm)
   2. Appearance (public realm) i.e. attractive
   3. Retailers & services (the right mix)
   4. Vision & strategy
   5. Experience

3.6   It is often perceived that an 'Anchor' store is required to make a success of town centres, but this comes well down the list.

Overall, the picture is that there are too many shop units; some are too big; some are in the wrong location. Previous strategies to construct out of town shopping centres has not helped matters, and people are increasingly spending more money on leisure activities and less on buying things (and when they do buy things, increasingly online). The industry view is that the taxation system for property taxes/business rates needs to be revisited (e.g. retail accounts for 5% of the economy, but pays about 25% of the business rates).

The local picture (New Forest District)

3.7   NFDC planning policy officers monitor occupancy within our High Street, recent monitoring shows local trends between 2016 – 2019. This is set out in Table 1 below.

In the South East, employment by industry in the High Street is as follows:

37%   Service industry
28%   Retail
17%   Accommodation / food activities
10%   Health / education / public admin

3.8   NFDC town centres are faring reasonably well – many of them contain A1[1] retail uses above the average levels of high streets in South East England. In addition there is an even spread of vacant uses across the towns, and no one town appears to be struggling. Fordingbridge has a slightly higher % of vacant units in comparison to others in the District – but emerging proposals for strategic housing sites (Policies SS16-SS18) in the Local Plan may help to boost the Fordingbridge economy in this regard.

Table 1

TOTTON	Use Class						
Survey	A1	A2	A3/A4/A5	C3	Other use class	Vacant	No. of units
2016	106	41	25	5	32	11	220
2019	101	38	26	6	35	14	220

HYTHE	Use Class						
Survey	A1	A2	A3/A4/A5	C3	Other use class	Vacant	No. of units
2016	63	21	15	3	9	5	116
2019	58	20	17	3	10	9	117

LYM'TN	Use Class						
Survey	A1	A2	A3/A4/A5	C3	Other use class	Vacant	No. of units
2016	180	40	29	9	33	18	309
2019	179	41	29	9	39	15	312

N MILTON	Use Class						
Survey	A1	A2	A3/A4/A5	C3	Other use class	Vacant	No. of units
2016	155	32	16	-	20	16	239
2019	144	35	21	-	29	12	241

R'WOOD	Use Class						
Survey	A1	A2	A3/A4/A5	C3	Other use class	Vacant	No. of units
2016	122	46	35	0	20	27	250
2019	129	44	36	1	21	21	252

F'BRIDGE	Use Class						
Survey	A1	A2	A3/A4/A5	C3	Other use class	Vacant	No. of units
2016	54	15	13	2	10	14	108
2019	55	12	12	3	15	11	108

National planning policy

National Planning Policy Framework (2019)

3.9 Planning policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation. Planning policies should:

a) define a network and hierarchy of town centres and promote their long-term vitality and viability – by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters;
b) define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas, and make clear the range of uses permitted in such locations, as part of a positive strategy for the future of each centre;
c) retain and enhance existing markets and, where appropriate, re-introduce or create new ones;
d) allocate a range of suitable sites in town centres to meet the scale and type of development likely to be needed, looking at least ten years ahead. Meeting anticipated needs for retail, leisure, office and other main town centre uses over this period should not be compromised by limited site availability, so town centre boundaries should be kept under review where necessary;
e) where suitable and viable town centre sites are not available for main town centre uses, allocate appropriate edge of centre sites that are well connected to the town centre. If sufficient edge of centre sites cannot be identified, policies should explain how identified needs can be met in other accessible locations that are well connected to the town centre; and
f) recognise that residential development often plays an important role in ensuring the vitality of centres and encourage residential development on appropriate sites.

3.10 Permitted development - the Government has expanded the scope of permitted development rights, enabling more flexibility and changes of use in shopping areas and town centres without the need for planning permission

Local Plan Review (2019)

Employment land and development:

3.11 The strategy set out in Local Plan policies is to support the renewal of and investment in town centres and large villages by applying a 'town centres first' approach in determining development proposals for retailing and the other Main Town Centre Uses.

Retail development and other main town centre uses:

3.12 In response to changing High Streets and retail markets the Government has expanded the scope of permitted development rights, enabling more flexibility and changes of use in shopping areas and town centres without the need for planning permission. Where planning permission is required the Plan aims is to strike an appropriate balance between responding to market demand and changing circumstances on the one hand, and the need to ensure that wherever possible settlement centres and shopping parades remain active, viable, and provide a healthy level of shopping facilities and services conveniently accessible to surrounding residential areas.

Other National Initiatives

3.13 In response to concerns about the future of the High Street the Government commissioned Mary Portas to review the future of UK High Streets in 2011. Her findings were published in a report which set out Mary Portas' view on what has led to the decline of our high streets. It:

- describes her vision for the future to breathe economic and community life back into our high streets and town centres

- makes recommendations on how to deliver that vision by getting town centres to run like businesses and getting the basics right to allow businesses to flourish

A summary of the recommendations is attached to the report as Appendix A, the full report can be found at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-portas-review-the-future-of-our-high-streets

3.14 The report received much publicity but put little emphasis on the dramatic structural changes impacting the retail industry through the convergence of changing consumer behaviour driven by technology and that brought about by the prevailing economic conditions.

3.15 Veteran retailer Bill Grimsey argued that it is already too late and that the High Street as we have grown to know it, is good as dead already. In 2013 the Grimsey Review set out retail veteran Bill Grimsey's vision of an alternative future for the high street.

Five years on, the Grimsey Review 2 assesses what has changed in the intervening years and builds on the recommendations in the original report.

3.16 The new review highlights its key findings, the barriers to progress and its recommendations and conclusions with a more detailed analysis of the challenges and opportunities for the high street over the coming years. There are also a number of case studies from around the world where Grimsey's vision has been at least partly realised.

Key findings of the Review are:

- Town Centre Commission Plans should be developed with a view to transforming high streets into community hubs (i.e. less retail, more leisure, entertainment, arts, education, health, housing, offices etc)

- Strong leadership is needed from elected mayors and/or local government working closely with the community

- The distinct heritage of a town should be central when developing places that people will engage with

- Sharing best practice needs to be done effectively so that innovation can be spread throughout the UK.

The review makes 25 recommendations, which centre around three themes:

- Creating a more supportive environment to enable improvements in planning, monitoring and sharing information about the changing role of the high street

- Changes at government and planning levels to empower local authorities

- Smarter use of technology to attract people back to the high street.

A summary of the recommendations is at Appendix B many of the recommendations require changes to central government policy. The full report can be accessed at; www.vanishinghighstreet.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/GrimseyReview2

The High Street Report

3.17 This report, published in December 2018, contains the recommendations of the High Streets Expert Panel which was established by the High Streets Minister Jake Berry MP in July 2018.

3.18 The panel, chaired by Sir John Timpson, were asked to diagnose the issues facing our high streets and town centres. They were then asked to advise on the best practical measures that central government can take to help.

The panel's recommendations cover 3 areas:

- the Town Centre Task Force;

- the Future High Streets Fund;

- short term measures to help high streets and town centres which were:

    - local campaign to tidy up the appearance of the High Street

    - Empty Shops and the pilot Open Door (December 2018)

    - Parking - ensuring that arrangements support local High Streets

3.19 Also published is the report 'High Street 2030: Achieving Change' by the Institute of Place Management which was commissioned to run 5 workshops to collect evidence to support the development of high street and town centre policy.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/766844/The_High_Street_Report.pdf

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/767529/High_Street_2030-Achieving_Change.pdf

Other Initiatives

3.20 There are several other initiatives that include;

Historic England High Streets Heritage Action Zones

3.21 Historic England in May 2019 launched a new fund which will allow it to work with partners to find new ways to champion and revive our historic high streets through the High Streets Heritage Action Zones scheme. Three investment objectives shape the programme:

- changing the perception of heritage and high streets

- supporting sustainable economic and cultural growth

- restoring and enhancing local historic character

There are three strands to the programme

- physical intervention - public realm and store fronts

- cultural programmes and events

- community engagement

There is no information on when the next funding round may open for this, further details can be found at:

https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/heritage-action-zones/regenerating-historic-high-streets/

Future High Street Fund

3.22 Funding for work to support failing High Streets has been available, a bid was submitted by NFDC however this was not successful.

High Streets Task Force

3.23   A new national High Streets Task Force supporting local leaders to revitalise high streets and town centres was launched in July 2019.

3.24   The High Streets Task Force will be comprised experts to provide tailored guidance and advice to local authorities seeking to breathe new life into their local high streets and town centres.

3.25   The Task Force has been created in response to the recommendations of the High Streets Expert Panel chaired by the hugely successful entrepreneur Sir John Timpson, who argue that successful change is created by local communities who have a vision for their high streets and town centres.

3.26   It will be run by the Institute of Place Management (IPM). The IPM has put together a consortium of high street experts with a wide range of knowledge and insight, including in planning and design. As part of this offer, local authorities will also be able to access up-to-date behavioural data that will provide insights into consumer habits. It will be fully operational by July 2020.

Local Government Association

3.27   The LGA provides some useful support and guidance on the future of town centres this includes:

• Revitalising town centres: A handbook for council leadership. It is intended to provide a high-level overview to guide councils in taking a strategic and evidence-based approach. The handbook contains suggestions of further reading, helpful resources and examples of good practice that can be accessed through a more extensive and detailed online toolkit.

https://local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/5.33%20Town%20Centre_04_web.pdf

• Town centre checklist: a self-assessment tool. This self-assessment 'town centre checklist' for councils and their partners uses a series of prompts to help gauge current and future progress in strategy development and delivery. Ideally it should be used as part of an annual review process as the different factors are progressively addressed.

https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/economic-growth/revitalising-town-centres-toolkit-councils/town-centre-checklist-self

Town Centre Regeneration and future planning

3.28   Changing consume behaviour, reduced footfall and the decline of major retailers have contributed to big changes in towns and cities. Retail still has an important role to play in centres, however there is scope to introduce or expand other uses within town centres to ensure sustainable, attractive and well-functioning mixed-use centres. Future town centres need a greater diversity of uses with densification of development around transport hubs in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Place making, and place planning needs to play a strong role to

ensure that there is good public realm and well-planned space to deliver the 'experience' shoppers are looking for and ensure dwell time.

4.   FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1. There are no financial implications from consulting on the adoption of this Policy.

5.   CRIME & DISORDER, ENVIRONMENTAL, DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

5.1. There are none.

6.   EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

6.1. A full assessment of equality and diversity implications would need to be carried out on a case by case basis.

7.   PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS

For further information contact:
Claire Upton-Brown
Chief Planning Officer
023 8028 5588
claire.upton-brown@nfdc.gov.uk

Recommendation of the Portas Review

Summary of recommendations

1. Put in place a "Town Team": a visionary, strategic and strong operational management team for high streets

2. Empower successful Business Improvement Districts to take on more responsibilities and powers and become "Super-BIDs"

3. Legislate to allow landlords to become high street investors by contributing to their Business Improvement District

4. Establish a new "National Market Day" where budding shopkeepers can try their hand at operating a low-cost retail business

5. Make it easier for people to become market traders by removing unnecessary regulations so that anyone can trade on the high street unless there is a valid reason why not

6. Government should consider whether business rates can better support small businesses and independent retailers

7. Local authorities should use their new discretionary powers to give business rate concessions to new local businesses

8. Make business rates work for business by reviewing the use of the RPI with a view to changing the calculation to CPI

9. Local areas should implement free controlled parking schemes that work for their town centres and we should have a new parking league table

10. Town Teams should focus on making high streets accessible, attractive and safe

11. Government should include high street deregulation as part of their ongoing work on freeing up red tape

12. Address the restrictive aspects of the 'Use Class' system to make it easier to change the uses of key properties on the high street

13. Put betting shops into a separate 'Use Class' of their own

14. Make explicit a presumption in favour of town centre development in the wording of the National Planning Policy Framework

15. Introduce Secretary of State "exceptional sign off" for all new out-of-town developments and require all large new developments to have an "affordable shops" quota

16. Large retailers should support and mentor local businesses and independent retailers

17. Retailers should report on their support of local high streets in their annual report

18. Encourage a contract of care between landlords and their commercial tenants by promoting the leasing code and supporting the use of lease structures other than upward only rent reviews, especially for small businesses

19. Explore further disincentives to prevent landlords from leaving units vacant

20. Banks who own empty property on the high street should either administer these assets well or be required to sell them

21. Local authorities should make more proactive use of Compulsory Purchase Order powers to encourage the redevelopment of key high street retail space

22. Empower local authorities to step in when landlords are negligent with new "Empty Shop Management Orders"

23. Introduce a public register of high street landlords

24. Run a high-profile campaign to get people involved in Neighbourhood Plans

25. Promote the inclusion of the High Street in Neighbourhood Plans

26. Developers should make a financial contribution to ensure that the local community has a strong voice in the planning system

27. Support imaginative community use of empty properties through Community Right to Buy, Meanwhile Use and a new "Community Right to Try"

28. Run a number of High Street Pilots to test proof of concept

Grimsey 2 Recommendations

1. Establish an empowered organisation or Town Centre Commission under strong, established leadership through the local authority for each town centre, with a defined remit to build a 20-year vision/strategy for their unique place. Ensure that this vision is underpinned by a comprehensive business/place plan.

2 Create a national independent organisation, similar to Scotland's Towns Partnership, to capture and share best practice from towns online for Town Centre Commissions to access. This could be hosted by the Local Government Association (LGA) but would need central government endorsement. Work such as this review, the recent LGA Revitalising Town Centres handbook, academic research, investment models and case studies could all be accessed, as well as information and advice on how to build an evidence base and how to write a town plan supported by a network of experts that the organisation co-ordinates.

3. Accept that there is already too much retail space in the UK and that bricks and mortar retailing can no longer be the anchor for thriving high streets and town centres. They need to be repopulated and re-fashioned as community hubs, including housing, health and leisure, entertainment, education, arts, business/office space and some shops.

4. Embed libraries and public spaces at the heart of each community as digital and health hubs that embrace smart technology.

5.   Establish common key performance indicators to measure the economic and public Health of each town. Link the reporting through a data dashboard to provide independent, objective and current data on performance. Data gathered by the town needs to be delivered in Open Format (Open Data) so it can be shared.

6 Set up a National Urban Data knowledge portal to support the implementation of data platforms for high streets and town centres. A shared dashboard (cloud-based) with a town Data Portal-as-a-Service should be piloted.

7 Local authorities should establish events teams to manage a comprehensive programme of activities that complement the Town Centre Commission Plan by driving footfall to local high streets. Government and planning

8 Accept that there is no confidence, in business rates, it is accelerating shop closures in many towns and is an outdated and unfair tax that needs a major overhaul. An immediate independent review should look to replace it with either a land/area/ property value or sales tax.

9 Give local authorities powers to introduce penalties and incentives for landlords of commercial properties that are left empty for more than 6-12 months. Review the existing property use class system to increase flexibility and look to establish a change of use to make the asset productive.

10 Introduce clear high street assets ownership accountability by establishing a landlord register for each town to be able to trace the owner of every single property and engage them in the health and wellbeing of the place.

11   Enable the change of use process through new legislation to be used to convert entire sub-high streets to residential or other uses within the agreed town plan and relocate successful independent businesses to the main commercial centre.

12   Connect planning applications, and in particular new developments, to the business plan for each town and ensure that developments fit within the criteria set by the Town Centre Commission Plan.

13   Give local authorities ultimate power in granting planning permission in line with the Town Centre Commission Plan. Remove the appeal and authority of the Planning Inspectorate to override decisions.

14   Give local authorities powers to introduce incentives and penalties to prevent the process of "land banking" for future speculative developments.

 15   Local authorities should appoint high quality design teams to create and enhance spaces for civic and social use. Design should celebrate the historic character and local identity with high quality streets and public realm.

16   Create a flexible planning framework to unlock the potential of areas by encouraging SMEs and making it easy to pilot new business concepts at low risk. The Fountain Arcade in Stockton-on-Tees offers a great example where the local authority is providing conditions to incubate new businesses at low risk.

17   Review Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) provision and make it more straight forward for Local Authorities to enforce a CPO in order to benefit the Town Centre Commission Plan.

18   Review and amend the planning use class system legislation to enable greater flexibility of building use and also to distinguish between the specific use of logistics warehousing used for direct retail sales.

19   Create a nominal maximum charge (£1) for the first two hours of parking in town centres, while introducing 30 minutes free parking in high streets with no paid extension option.

20   Review and evaluate future use and relevance of out of town shopping parks, prepare a plan to bring unwanted space back into use to benefit the community in line with the Town Centre Commission Plan, while applying a Town Centre First policy and calling for no further out of town development.

21 Local section 106 income or any planning gains should be used to support the delivery of the Town Centre Commission Plan.

22   Establish a review of the Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) process, which have relevance in big urban conurbations but needs more scrutiny in smaller towns. Consider replacing them with Community Improvement Districts (CIDs) embracing all the

stakeholders, occupiers, owners and service providers in an area including the local authority. Smarter use of technology

23   BT and Virgin Media, the major beneficiaries of Super Connected Cities £150m funding between 2014 and 2016, need to offer a Town Digital Package to ensure ongoing digital transformation to the top 13 cities and all 1,048 UK high streets in smaller towns.

24   Install LED lights in street lamps to improve the quality of light on the street, while minimising costs. The lamps will also provide improved security as they can include CCTV cameras and integration with police systems for fast response.

25   Provide free public Wi-Fi and well-connected workplaces that support flexible working patterns and attract freelancers to high streets an

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