

Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels – 2018/19

This annual report covers the work of the four scrutiny panels between May 2018 and March 2019.

A decision was approved at Annual Council in May 2018 to increase the number of Scrutiny Panels from three to four in order to reflect the workload of the Council. The Panels had previously been reviewed in 2011. The four Panels are:

- Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel;
- Community and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel;
- Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel; and
- Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel

The Panels have been very busy with four special (additional) meetings being held in November / December 2018.

The Council has seen considerable change this year, and much of it has been overseen by the Panel's working groups.

A range of new housing strategies and policies have been put in place (which were publically consulted on) as part of important work carried out by the Homelessness Task and Finish Group. These included a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and a new Allocation policy. The overarching Housing Strategy has a commitment to provide at least 600 new Council homes up to 2026 as well as facilitating a wider objective across the District to see a significant increase in house building, as set out in the Council's Draft Local Plan.

The Panels have focused on external matters such as Economic Development and the issues of Broadband, and have considered a number of new initiatives in ICT and the whole concept of Smarter Working. The Revenue and Benefits team have moved to Appletree Court from Lymington Town Hall which was a significant achievement. The latest phase of Smarter Working is currently underway and will see a dramatic change for the better in the working environment at Appletree Court.

A review of Health and Leisure centres has been carried out once again with a Task and Finish Group. Various options were considered and a partner approach was found to be the best option in terms of value for money and for securing the long term future of the service.

The Panels and various Task and Finish Groups have reviewed Council areas to improve service provision and sought efficiencies in light of the current economic climate. They have also sought to introduce new environmental projects, such as textile bring banks and provision for electric vehicles in the District.

COMMUNITY & LEISURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL **(Responsible for scrutiny of the following portfolios:** **Community Affairs, Leisure and Wellbeing)**

Community Grants

The Panel established a task and finish group to review the process for considering applications for community grants and also examined in detail the various grants that were given to Community First New Forest to establish how the money was being spent. As a result of the review revised guidelines for both the community grants and the Councillor community engagement grants were recommended to the Portfolio Holder and adopted. The process now encourages all applicants to seek other sources of funding and not to look on the Council as the resource to be approached first. Applicants for capital grants must source at least 50% of the overall cost from other sources. In addition, for the first time, a firm budget has been set for both capital and revenue grants. The Panel has recommended that the funding of Community First New Forest should, in future, be through a service level agreement, outside the standard community grants process.

This year Council received 22 applications, of which 2 were deemed to be ineligible as they did not meet the defined criteria for assistance. In total 20 applicants were invited to give a presentation to the Group outlining their grant request. The Group made recommendations to the Panel and to the Cabinet on the allocation of grants for 2019/20. These recommendations were taken forward by the Cabinet and agreed by the Council when setting the budget.

Dibden Golf Centre

The Dibden Golf Centre Working Group now meets Mytime Active on a quarterly basis, to monitor progress against the agreed investment programme. Following the concerns raised by this Council there had been a management restructure and MyTime Active's new Regional Director had visited the Council and made a number of commitments, some of which were implemented immediately. The liaison arrangements with the District Council have been improved, as have the role of meetings with the user groups.

At the most recent meeting with Mytime Active the Working Group had been satisfied that there were clear signs of improved collaboration with the Council's officers and there was an open minded approach to developing the use of the golf centre to the benefit of all parties.

Community Safety

In fulfilling its role as the statutory committee for scrutinising crime and disorder, the Panel reviewed the strategic assessment prepared by the Safer New Forest Strategy and Delivery Group. This assessed the Partnership's performance against the actions identified in the 2017/18 Partnership Plan, which would inform the agreed strategies for the 2019/20 Partnership Plan. The Panel concurred with the view that the introduction of 4 focussed priority areas was proving effective and more time should be allowed for the consequent actions to embed further.

The Panel also raised the issue of the harm being caused by cybercrimes which were becoming increasingly prevalent, and this concern is being brought to the attention of the Safer New Forest Partnership.

The Panel was also briefed on the Safer New Forest Conference on community safety, which was held at Brockenhurst College on 15 November 2018. This was the first such conference in the District and proved successful in identifying and bringing together the resources that were available to address community safety issues.

Cllr Clarke, the Council's representative on the Hampshire Crime Panel has also kept the Panel updated on the work of that Panel and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hampshire.

Corporate Customer Services

The Panel has reconvened the Customer Services Task and Finish Group to promote changes to the Council's interface with customers, in particular the Council's website. As part of the review of operations of the health and leisure centres, the Customer Service call centre is no longer receiving telephone calls for bookings and other enquiries, which are now diverted to on-line systems or contact directly with the centre involved. The Panel has been kept updated on progress towards the procurement of the new website, which should be delivered in late 2019 or early 2020. The Panel will receive a further progress report in June.

Health and Leisure Centres

In addition to maintaining a watching brief over the performance of the health and leisure centres, through regular reports from the Portfolio Holder, the Panel established a task and finish group to examine options for the future management of the Council's 5 health and leisure centres. This task and finish group undertook extensive research leading to a recommendation to a special meeting, in November 2018, recommending that options for possible partnership, with a not-for-profit or trust leisure provider, should be evaluated further, which can only be done through a procurement exercise. This option, which should achieve the required level of operational savings, while also opening the possibility of attracting essential external investment and allowing longer term business planning, was subsequently approved by the Cabinet. The Task and Finish Group is continuing to work, currently monitoring progress of the research and other preparatory work for the procurement exercise. This work will also lay the foundations for the establishment of a Council-owned, arms-length company, should the partnership option not, when the submissions are analysed, secure the required benefits.

Health and Wellbeing Agenda

The Panel has been briefed on the initiatives being promoted by the Council under the health and wellbeing agenda, both through the Council's own health and leisure centres and working with schools and other partners.

CCTV

The Panel has been briefed on the operation of the Council's CCTV system, including options for the future. The relocation of the CCTV control room within the lower ground floor at Appletree Court has now been completed.

Community Strategy

The Panel has been kept informed about progress in drafting a new Community Strategy, which will work in partnership with other organisation to secure the delivery of the Council's aspirations. A draft strategy document will be considered by the Panel in June.

CORPORATE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

Responsible for scrutiny of the following portfolios:

Leader & Corporate Affairs / Finance, Corporate Services & Improvement/ Local Economic Development, Property & Innovation.

MAIN REVIEWS 2018/19

Budget

The Panel received the report of the Budget Task and Finish Group which contained comments and recommendations relating to all portfolios, touching on subjects such as use of modern technology, income generation, Property Investment resource, LEPS funding, ICT Strategy, and partnering/collaboration with other organisations. It has requested an update for the June Panel meeting.

Economic Development Strategy

The Panel considered the Council's proposed Economic Development Strategy for 2018-2023.

The Strategy set out a vision and related activities to tackle the identified barriers to growth in the following five key themes . The Strategy was agreed by Cabinet.

- Developing a Skilled Workforce
- Increasing Growth and Productivity
- Developing Local Infrastructure
- Facilitating Vibrant Towns and Villages
- Promoting the Unique New Forest Offer

Broadband Provision in the New Forest

The Panel has received a presentation from Hampshire County Council and Openreach representatives, on provision of superfast (24Mbs) broadband in Hampshire, a summary of local broadband speeds/coverage dated September 2018, and feedback from local residents, businesses and parish councils on broadband service in the District.

The Panel agreed that the Council continue to work with its partners to further implement the rollout of coverage in New Forest District whilst publicising further initiatives to encourage the greatest possible take-up and improve broadband coverage for residents / businesses of New Forest District. It was also recommended that wherever possible, full use be made of planning policies to require provision of a high speed fibre broadband connection to the new properties in the District. Officers were asked to use their best endeavours to promote "joined up working" within the District among the various agencies in order to provide smoother implementation of individual broadband provision projects.

Property Investment Strategy

The Panel has monitored the operation of two investment strategies, Commercial and Residential, including the creation of a group of companies, wholly owned by the Council. This included the related business plan for the group of companies, through which the Council's residential property investment strategy would be implemented. The Panel also approved the company's operating arrangements and Articles of Association. The Panel requested regular progress updates.

Smarter working

The Panel considered the strategic approach to smarter working, together with related implementation and budget plans for the period 2018-2021. Smarter Working' was essential for transforming and streamlining the Council to meet current financial pressures and to plan for the longer term.

The cost and environmental impact of work would be reduced as space was shared and used more efficiently. This would provide staff with more choice about when, where and how they worked, supported and connected by effective and appropriate technology. It would also meet the public's increasing expectation that they should be able to interact with the Council through technological means, such as smart phones, whenever they wished. Budget provision for smarter working had been included in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan capital programme for the period up to 2020/21 and totalled £3.5 million over three years. Out of this budgeted sum, full implementation of Office 365 was estimated to cost £750,000 over the next 18 months, with an additional revenue cost of £200,000 per annum. A further £500,000 would be needed for the first tranche of accommodation changes at Appletree Court.

The Panel supported the proposals which were subsequently agreed by the Cabinet.

ICT Strategy 2018-2022 / ICT Investment

The Panel considered the ICT Strategy and a related presentation emphasising the tremendous pace of global change in ICT, and the Council's need to adapt to it whilst at the same time ensuring that it continued to cater for all forms of communication used by its residents.

The Panel also received details of the ICT investments since April 2017 together with the implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan of delivering the ICT Strategy 2018-2022. Key elements included Replacement of equipment, smarter working and future requirements (resilience and security, members ICT, digital residence and customer engagement replacement of applications moving out of support, and next generation ICT solutions).

Customer Services

Another aspect of Smarter Working was the Customer Services Review. The Panel received updates from the Task and Finish Group on progress with the Review. A lot of work was being undertaken in the background to improve customer transactions, technology and workflow. The ICT infrastructure was being upgraded and related resources being brought forward to improve new ways of working. In particular, the Group were closely monitoring the development and specification for the new Council website. The emphasis was on improving the customer experience, providing slick online transactions and driving efficiencies whilst ensuring the needs of older customers, who wished to deal with the Council face to face, would continue to be met.

Income Generation

A task and finish group was set up to identify income generation sources and had Identified potential opportunities in advertising and sponsorship in addition to the work already being done on shared services, digital transformation, commercial partnership and Investment

Liaison With Department for Work and Pensions / Universal Credit

The Panel met with a representative from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and received an update on the roll-out of Universal Credit which was the most major change in welfare systems in the last 50 years. The national Universal Credit roll-out for new claimants had gone live in December 2018. A managed migration pilot of 10,000 claimants was planned for July 2019. National migration will commence from November 2020 with an estimated timescale for NFDC of 2021 for existing Housing Benefit claimants.

In the New Forest, there were 4,113 working aged Housing Benefit claimants, of which 1,448 were Council tenants. The New Forest CAB will be assisting Universal Credit claimants from 1 April 2019, with Help to Claim, work funded by the DWP.

The Panel were pleased to note the excellent working relationship between the Council and the DWP.

Complaints Annual Report

The Panel received an overview of the complaints received by the Corporate Complaints Team in 2017/18, including statistical data from the Local Government Ombudsman. There had been very few complaints to the Ombudsman, and EMT, which had considered the report, had been satisfied that corporate complaints were handled appropriately.

Other items considered by the Panel

- Procurement Strategy
- Organisational Strategy
- Human Resources Strategy 2018-2022
- Film New Forest - Progress Update
- Annual performance and budget out-turn report 2017/18
- Council tax reduction scheme task and finish group / council tax discounts and exemptions, voluntary payments and related policies / NNDR / Debit Recovery Policy
- Asset maintenance & replacement programme and general fund capital programme for 2019/20
- Capital Strategy

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ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
(Responsible for scrutiny of the following portfolios:
Environment and Regulatory Services and Planning and Infrastructure)

Car Parking in Hythe

The Panel is monitoring the need for additional car parking spaces to be provided in Hythe, following the sale of the St John's Street car park for a supermarket development. At present the evidence suggests that there is sufficient parking available, with the only pressure on parking being market day, which is on a Tuesday. The new supermarket is now open and visitors to the village are able to park there to shop, and remain parked while they visit other premises, which has made more spaces available. Plans have been drawn up to provide additional spaces, but the Portfolio Holder has been advised that the Panel considers that the expense of providing them cannot currently be justified. Monitoring on use levels will continue to make sure that there is not a problem and the Panel will receive a further monitoring report in due course.

Energy Efficient Vehicles and Infrastructure

At the request of the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regulatory Affairs the Panel established a Task and Finish Group to look at the Council's fleet of vehicles to ensure that the most energy and cost efficient selections are being procured; and also at the potential to increase the infrastructure to encourage the greater use of electric vehicles by installing electric vehicle charging points at council-owned premises. The Task and Finish Group has sought external advice from the Energy Savings Trust, which has undertaken an audit of the Council's fleet to evaluate potential options. The Group has also been exploring the Hampshire-wide procurement package that is on offer for installing electric vehicle charging points. This has included a meeting with a representative of Southampton City Council to hear about their experiences and meetings with the operators and funders of the Hampshire-wide procurement contract.

With respect to the Council's vehicle fleet, the Panel has commended the Task and Finish Group's recommendations to the Portfolio Holder. In essence, 2 electric vans will be procured for use by the car park wardens and a further 2 vans to trial around various services operating from the depots to establish the practical parameters of their use, to inform future procurement decisions. The Panel is recommending that, in future, the default position should be that an electric vehicle is purchased, with a business case needed to justify a different fuel system.

The Panel will be receiving the Task and Finish Group's recommendations about the possible installation of electric vehicle charging points in council-owned car parks at their June meeting.

Air Quality and the Southampton Clean Air Zone

Throughout the year the Panel has maintained a watching brief on the work, jointly with Southampton City Council, to introduce a Clean Air Zone covering the City, as required by Government to address identified poor air quality. The Clean Air Zone will affect a 1 km stretch of the A35 leading to the boundary with the City. As a result of extensive research and modelling work it has been established that the air quality in this District will comply with the required standards by December 2019, and that no identified measures can bring that compliance forward in time. As a consequence, following consultation with the Government's National Joint Air Quality Unit, a "business as usual" approach, with no additional actions required, was commended to the Cabinet and subsequently agreed by the Council. Real-time and diffusion tube monitoring will continue to ensure that air quality in this District does achieve the predicted improved standards. Air quality will form part of this Council's over-arching Environmental Strategy, which will include examination of issues

such as the energy efficient vehicles and electric vehicle charging infrastructure which is referred to above.

The Government has now approved this Council's Air Quality Plan, with the "business as usual" approach, and particularly commended the joint working arrangements between this Council and Southampton City Council.

Coastal Defence Funding

The Coastal Funding Task and Finish Group have continued to explore options for securing funding for future coastal defence work in the District. A draft report has now been prepared for consultation and the Panel is expecting to consider this report in June.

Contaminated Land Strategy

The Panel established a task and finish group to advise the Portfolio Holder on the presentational aspects of the Council's new strategy for how it deals with contaminated land. Updates had been needed to reflect changes in legislation and practices. The new Strategy was commended to the Portfolio Holder for adoption.

Food Safety

The Panel has been kept updated on the activities and performance of the food safety service over the last year, and supported the proposed work programme for the food safety team in 2019/20. The Panel was satisfied that the food hygiene rating scheme was working efficiently and was driving up standards of cleanliness in food premises. They also welcomed the introduction of initiatives such as "Eat Out, Eat Well" which is encouraging local businesses and schools to offer healthy eating options, as part of wider initiatives to tackle obesity.

New Forest District Local Plan

The Panel has maintained a watching brief, throughout the year, on progress on the Local Plan which has now gone through the public consultation exercise and will shortly be subject to Examination in Public by an Inspector.

Kerbside Glass Collection

The Panel has monitored the Council's performance in collecting glass for recycling, following the introduction of the kerbside collection of glass and the subsequent reduction in the number of bring sites offering glass collection. The potential tonnage collected had also decreased as manufacturers had reduced the amount of glass in bottles and other containers. In the event, tonnages had been maintained, although efforts continue to further increase the percentage of glass within the waste stream that is correctly recycled.

The text reminder scheme that was set up to assist in the monthly kerbside glass collections has proved successful and has also allowed other text alert schemes to be established. This was particularly useful in poor weather conditions, when the public could be kept updated on what was happening with waste collections.

Project Integra and National Waste Strategy

The Panel received its annual update on performance by Project Integra and was briefed on future developments that would affect the refuse and recycling collection activities. There are a number of initiatives coming forward that will affect this Council's performance on recycling, including the change to the circular resource economy, placing greater responsibilities on producers; and the potential introduction of deposit return schemes for some containers. The Government has recently launched a consultation on a national Waste Strategy, with the deadline for responses in May. The Cabinet has appointed a Task and Finish Group to work with the Environment and Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder to develop a response on behalf of the Council.

Textile Bring Banks

The Panel set up a task and finish group to look at textile bring banks situated on council-owned land, such as car parks. The Panel has commended the Task and Finish Group's recommendations to the Portfolio Holder. In essence, it is proposed that the Council will join the Hampshire-wide contract for textile recycling, which is being hosted by Fareham Borough Council. This will bring a number of practical and financial benefits to this Council. It has been suggested that the income from this source (which should be greater than the Council has received to date) should be divided between supporting recycling initiatives in the District (20%); the Council's Community Grants fund (20%); and at least 2 local charities to be selected each year (60%).

HOUSING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (Responsible for scrutiny of the Housing Services Portfolio)

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

The Homelessness Task and Finish Group carried out a review of homelessness in order to better understand the reasons for homelessness, the Council's response to homelessness, the support services available to homeless people and the effectiveness of these. As part of this review, the Group also reviewed the Housing Allocation Policy (i.e. how the Council allocates social housing in the District).

A series of recommendations from the Homelessness Task and Finish Group were approved by the Cabinet in December 2018 which paved the way for a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and a new Allocation Policy. These include the use of more temporary and emergency temporary accommodation provided by Council rather than by relying solely on private B&B accommodation. Further a new Multi-Agency Homelessness Forum was set up bringing together for the first time, the various voluntary groups, statutory bodies, Church groups and other professionals who work with the homeless in the District. The Forum meets quarterly, is extremely well attended and provides an excellent platform to ensure there is joined –up thinking to assist the homeless in our area.

A Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was approved by Cabinet in April and approval is sought by full Council at this meeting.

Housing Allocation Policy

The Council's Housing Allocation Policy has also been extensively reviewed. The Homelessness Task and Finish Group and the Panel were instrumental in developing the principles behind the policy. The new Policy takes into account the new duties to homeless households brought in by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and also creates new Bands / Priorities so that social housing is allocated based on housing need rather than time spent on the waiting list. Cabinet, at its meeting in April, approved the new Allocation Policy and Council will also be asked to approve at its April meeting.

Tenant Participation

The aims and objectives of the Tenant Involvement Group (TIG) were presented to the Panel and the types of issues that were discussed with tenants. It was noted that there were many benefits of tenant participation and it enabled a more proactive and streamlined approach to matters.

Housing Stock Update

The Panel received a presentation which detailed the breakdown of Council properties by stock type, e.g. one / two bed etc. and the demand on the housing register. Further updates would be provided to the Panel on a regular basis.

Remodelling of sheltered accommodation

A number of older persons accommodation schemes had been decommissioned in order to provide age restricted general needs accommodation. The remodelling of former communal parts of the accommodation included the conversion into self-contained flats. This had provided further much needed accommodation in the District. Further schemes would be developed in the future.

Review of Service Charges

A review of service charges has been carried out regarding the charges to tenants of extra-care, licenced hostels, general needs properties and age restricted accommodation. The proposals saw no change or a reduction in some cases whereas other tenants would receive some increases in service charge. Those tenants who would have an increase in service

charge of more than £2 per week would have this increase phased over a period of three years.

Universal Credit

Members received a presentation on Universal Credit which incorporated six working age benefits. Details of the roll-out period were tabled to the Panel. It was noted that those in receipt of housing benefits would need to apply for Universal Credit.

Fire Safety Policy for Housing (Landlord Services)

Following Cabinet approval of the overarching Fire Safety Strategy in November 2018, a specific Policy for Housing (Landlord Services) was considered by the Panel. The Policy deals with fire safety measures in the Council's Housing stock. The Panel considered this to be a comprehensive document which sets out the roles and responsibilities and clearly identified the legislative and regulatory duties.

Private Sector Housing

The Portfolio Holder for Housing Services is now responsible for Private Sector Housing following a move from Environmental Health to Housing. The Panel received a presentation to inform them on the different areas included within Private Sector Housing and the Council's role. In a number of areas, for example, Disabled Facility Grants, the Council has a statutory responsibility to provide a service, whereas in other areas such as Tenant and Landlord Advice, the Council has a discretionary responsibility. Currently a Task and Finish Group is looking in detail at what is involved with Private Sector Housing and will be assisting in devising a new Private Sector Housing Strategy. The Panel will be kept fully informed of the work in this regard.