

APPENDIX A

INTRODUCTION TO THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY PANEL

Welcome to the Annual report for the Overview and Scrutiny Panel 2007/08. Thanks must go to the officers and Members for their support and input which has made the Chair and Vice-Chair's role an enjoyable and relatively easy one.

We have covered many aspects of the Council's operations throughout the year, and learnt a good deal about how things work (or not) and why. I hope we have enhanced some areas, and tightened up on others. A great deal of the Council's workings still needs to be scrutinised, and it is with this in mind that several Task and Finish groups will be established.

The essence of a good Scrutiny function is seeing the actions and recommendations being put into practice and having a positive impact on our Council. We must, as a Panel ensure that any actions or recommendations we propose, are acted upon and robustly pursued.

Oadby and Wigston's Committee system does not lend itself towards an excellent Scrutiny function but, the Cabinet system does. This is not a criticism, merely an observation. In the cabinet system there is a large pool of Councillors with only the Scrutiny function as a meaningful role. We have a finite number of Members with which to do a great deal of work, which we shall continue to do as well as we can.

We should look forward to the challenges that will come our way in the future, and address them in a way that gives the Residents a service they will be proud of.

I hope that you the reader will scrutinise this report, and find it informative and (hopefully) interesting.

Councillor Michael Charlesworth
12th May 2008

Annual Report to the Scrutiny Panel for the 2007/08 Municipal Year

The full Scrutiny Panel met on 11 occasions throughout the year.

The Panel comprised of the following Members:-

Councillor M H Charlesworth	-	Chair	(11 attendances)
Councillor M Griffiths	-	Vice Chair	(10 “)
Councillor Mrs L Broadley	-		(8 “)
Councillor Ms C L Edmonston	-		(4 “)
Councillor D A Gamble	-		(10 “)
Councillor Mrs J M Gore	-		(8 “)
Councillor J Kaufman	-		(7 “)
Councillor Mrs H Loydall	-		(9 “)
Councillor R E R Morris	-		(4 “)
Councillor P Swift	-		(10 “)

1. Advance Programme

The Panel received the revised annual programme of scrutiny work for the 2007/08 Municipal Year at its meeting held on 22nd May 2007. With the exception of an additional report on local transport provision, the Panel resolved to adopt and publish the programme.

Following Member training on Scrutiny the Chairman raised the question of items for future consideration at the meeting held on 25th September 2007. He requested all Panel members to consider suitable topics for scrutiny over the next twelve months and bring their ideas to a future meeting in order that a comprehensive approach to the methods to be adopted could be agreed upon.

At the 29th October 2007 meeting the Chairman referred to his request at the previous meeting regarding suggestions for future reviews.

Amongst those received were the following:-

- Absence management with particular regard to Friday and Monday absences.
- Administration of Allotments.
- Scrutiny of Primary Care Trusts (PCTs)
- Community/Area Forums
- Attendance at County Council Scrutiny Commission Meetings by members of the Scrutiny Panel who are not County Councillors, with reports being brought to future meetings.

At the 4th December 2007 meeting Members raised the issue of exempt items and when actions taken by the press meant that these could be openly debated. The Chairman clarified that Members would wish to receive guidance regarding the policy of exempt items. It was mentioned that the County Council operated a Sensitive Issues Procedure and it was suggested that this be implemented by this Authority so that when such issues arise the Chief Executive can decide when and whether to notify Members of the lifting of the exempt provisions.

Members concurred and accordingly a report was requested for the February 2008 meeting regarding the procedure and process for dealing with sensitive issues.

At the same meeting Members also suggested a couple of further items for placing on the advance programme of reviews and these were Civil Parking Enforcement and Local Area or Community Forums.

A draft advance programme for the 2008/09 Municipal Year was brought to the 29th April 2008 meeting of the Panel.

Members agreed with the programme as submitted and were asked to consider which topics were suitable for scrutiny by the method of setting up task and finish groups. Members were therefore requested to notify officers before the next meeting of the Panel, which topics were considered most suitable for this method in order that this may be resolved at the first meeting of the Panel in the new Municipal Year.

Outcome

During 2008/09 it is intended to set up three task and finish groups which will look at topics to be selected from the advance programme. This will enable the full involvement and participation of each member of the Panel in an area of detailed investigation and scrutiny.

2. Annual Review of Scrutiny

At the meeting held on 22nd May 2007 the Panel received the draft annual report of work undertaken during 2006/07, along with the outcomes achieved.

Members resolved to approve the contents of this report which would form the basis of the official stand alone annual scrutiny report to be produced for general circulation.

3. Key Performance Indicators

Towards the end of the 2006/07 Municipal Year the Panel had selected a number of performance indicators with the intention of monitoring progress throughout 2007/08 . The first report was brought to the 22nd May 2007 meeting when it was explained that external auditors regard these performance indicators as very important and the Council is judged accordingly.

For the first report the actual performance for 2006/07 was compared to the actual performance for the previous year, with an appropriate colour coding used to aid the comparison. There were thirteen green and seven reds which indicated a positive direction of travel. Members heard that the situation was probably even better than portrayed since a number of sections had not yet been able to answer all of the salient points and this would be covered in a subsequent meeting.

A discussion ensued around these indicators including how the targets were set, how reporting could be improved, the value of certain indicators and whether national figures for composting and waste were available.

The Panel resolved that with the request for national statistics to be made available for Members, the report be noted.

At the 20th June meeting Members discussed the indicator concerning the percentage of rent collected, the indicator measuring the average time taken to re-let Local Authority Housing and the indicator giving a percentage score against a quality of Planning Services checklist.

In discussing recycling levels it was requested that an article be published in the Council's residents' newsletter informing the public what sort of plastic goods could be recycled and which ones could not.

At the 17th July meeting the Panel discussed the number of working days lost to sickness per full time employee, the percentage of Council Tax collected, the percentage of NNDR collected, the percentage of rent collected, the number of fraud investigations closed per 1,000 caseload and the time taken to re-let Local Authority Housing.

In considering the Performance Indicators at the 28th August 2007 meeting the following points were made:

The local indicator for the number of recycling bags distributed to visitors to Council offices was unclear in its set target. This would therefore be re-assessed for the next report.

The recycling percentage was down slightly, possibly due to the improved facilities at the County Council owned Civic Amenities Site.

The number of Fraud Investigations closed per 1,000 caseload had been principally affected by the long term sickness leave of the Fraud Officer, and in addition the National Fraud Initiative was conducting a data matching exercise which required responses that were time consuming. Percentage of Rent collected – this was principally a cash flow situation and the arrears as such were not increasing. However, further analysis of the payment delays would be undertaken.

Recycling Contamination Rate had been negotiated downwards with the County Council and would be assessed for accuracy later in the Municipal year. This would then be subject to an agreement with the County Council.

At the meeting on 29th October 2007, the Panel discussed BVPI 76c 'the number of fraud investigations closed per 1,000 claimants' where the target was 18, with the actual to the month end being 3. Members therefore expressed their wish to see a written report explaining the apparent disparity between the set target and the actual performance.

The Head of Revenues and Benefits duly submitted this report to the 4th December meeting of the Panel. At this same meeting the Panel also heard about the new set of 198 National Indicators which will be implemented from April 2008 and also the use of 35 of these for measuring progress of the Local Area Agreement.

Section Heads were currently considering whether they wished to use any of the current set of Best Value Performance Indicators as local indicators in the future. Members therefore asked if the position with indicators could be condensed and simplified into a future report to the Panel ahead of the advanced programme for 2008/09. It was suggested that this be made available for the March meeting.

At the 29th January 2008 meeting the Panel heard how the new BVPIs would be introduced and that Service Heads had already been consulted with regard to the total number of new BVPIs. It was clarified that the ones selected for District Councils had been set by Central Government, not the Local Area Agreement. There were additional BVPIs likely to be introduced regarding Children's Services, but many would only be an annual indicator.

At the 26th February 2008 meeting it was confirmed that the new indicators would be presented to the next meeting so that Members could discuss and agree which ones to retain and which new

ones should be selected for scrutiny in the forthcoming Municipal Year. Members concurred with the format of the report which will therefore continue when the new Performance Indicators are assimilated.

The Recycling Contamination rate had now been agreed with the County Council and represented an overall reduction from 11% to 2.94% following negotiations.

At the 25th March 2008 meeting Members expressed their satisfaction that there were no red indicators and a discussion ensued about the necessity of reporting those whose status was continually green. Members concurred with the view that it was important to free up officer time to utilise resources primarily to where they are needed, for example red and amber plus downward trends indicated by the monitoring of all indicators.

The new indicators were referred to, which had been broken down from the total of 198 to 19 for the Panel to consider, but for which details had yet to be firmed up. Those indicators falling to outside bodies such as the County Council and the Health Authorities could still be scrutinised as necessary.

It was agreed that Members should bring their thoughts to the next meeting on which indicators they would like to retain and which should be prioritised in relation to the Authority's performance.

At the 29th April 2008 meeting, Members expressed their satisfaction at the performance as recorded, with no 'red lights' or worrying trends evident.

Members heard that at present there is no benchmarking available for the new National Performance Indicators and hence it was agreed there will be no report of Key Performance Indicators for the next two meetings. A full report on the recommended indicators would be brought to the July 2008 meeting.

Outcome

This is the first year that the Panel has reviewed the Council's progress on a range of topics through the regular monitoring of Best Value Performance Indicators.

This exercise has led to more detailed consideration of several issues, such as the level of Sickness Absence and the number of Fraud Investigations completed.

The Panel will continue to monitor this topic, particularly with the introduction of the new set of National Indicators.

4. Internal Audit Reports

Throughout the course of the year the Panel received regular reports on the work undertaken by the Council's Internal Audit Team and these are as follows:-

- a) Grants to Voluntary Organisations (22nd May 2007)
- b) Cash Income – Planning/Development Control (22nd May 2007)
- c) Building/Development Control – Miscellaneous Income (22nd May 2007)

During discussion on this item, Members expressed disappointment that previous audit recommendations had not been implemented by the Built Environment section in regard to its miscellaneous income. A written report was requested from the Head of Service to address the situation and to be brought to the next meeting.

This report was brought to the 20th June 2007 meeting and Members noted the reasons for the audit recommendation not being implemented and subsequently noted the report.

d) Car Loans – Central 2006/07 (22nd May 2007)

In discussing this item Members were concerned about the giving of staff car loans as part of a recruitment package for specialised posts. It was felt that if these benefits are not time constrained, it could lead to inequalities.

Members called for an equal pay audit to demonstrate the transparency of the process and requested a written report on the Council's policy to be brought to the next meeting of the Panel.

At the 20th June meeting Members received the additional report that had been requested and were supplied with details of the numbers of staff in each pay band who are eligible for car loans.

Following a lengthy discussion on this topic Members agreed to recommend to the Policy and Resources Committee that the Car Loan Scheme incorporates consideration of climate change issues in the specification of vehicles purchased.

Members also concurred on the view that the administration of insurance certificates should be rigorously enforced (i.e. the production of current insurance certificates).

e) Council Tax Recovery and Enforcement 2006/07 (22nd May 2007)

f) Telephone Review – 2006/07 (22nd May 2007)

Following a discussion on this item it was agreed that the staff guidance needed to be rewritten and hence it was resolved that the Head of Human Resources ensures that the guidance to staff is revised.

g) Hackney Carriage and Taxi Licences (22nd May 2007)

During discussions on this topic Members voiced concern at the apparent bad practice of relying upon weekly motor insurance and called for the situation to be reviewed. It was unclear what was the legal requirement and whether this practice was adopted by other authorities. In addition, concern was expressed at the situation regarding Criminal Records Bureau checks. It was agreed that the Head of Legal and Licensing produce a written report addressing these issues, to be received at the next meeting of the Panel.

The Head of Legal and Licensing duly reported to the next meeting on 20th June 2007. The Panel heard that approximately 140 vehicles are licensed with this authority, of which just six at any given time have weekly insurance certificates. There was therefore no great risk to the Council. The logistical problem is that the insurance is not co-terminus with the annual licence and therefore until this catches up, interim insurance certificates are provided and this is a practice that is also followed by other Local Authorities.

A thorough discussion took place and covered the annual CRB checks required as part of the annual licence renewal process, the issuing of a letter authorising a driver to continue driving whilst CRB check results are awaited and the process of spot checks carried out by the Authority.

The Panel resolved to note the report and requested that the Licensing Authority incorporate the requirement to produce a valid insurance certificate within seven days of the carrying out of a spot check by this Authority.

h) Community & Cultural Development Implementation Plan (20th June 2007)
2006/07

i) Vehicle Maintenance 2006/07 (20th June 2007)

j) Golf Course 2006/07 (20th June 2007)

The Panel requested that a report be brought back to the next meeting on an issue surrounding the procedure relating to the retention and checking of all unused tickets to ensure that they are accounted for in the register. This information was provided to all Members of the Panel via a letter.

k) Brocks Hill Café 2006/07 (20th June 2007)

l) Special Collections and White Goods 2006/07 (20th June 2007)

m) Payroll – Mayors and Members System (20th June 2007)

n) Printer Cartridge Procurement – 2006/07 (28th August 2007)

o) Food Safety and Inspection 2007/08 (28th August 2007)

p) Bailiff's Contract – 2007/08 (28th August 2007)

In answer to a question it was confirmed that the Council does not pay for the Bailiff's Service, this is charged to the debtor.

q) Right to Buy – 2007/08 (28th August 2007)

Members heard that this was an inefficient procedure that demanded change. Accordingly the Housing Section would take over the responsibility for co-ordinating information for Service Charges.

r) Cash Income – Pitches and Pavilions (28th August 2007)

s) Cash Income – Cemeteries 2006/07 (28th August 2007)

t) Cash Income – Bowls 2006/07 (28th August 2007)

u) Customer Services Centre – Work Practices 2006/07 (28th August 2007)

Members heard that Management Team received the necessary management information on a monthly basis.

They were however concerned at the proposal to reduce the working hours of the Cashiers' Office which may increase the usage of the cash kiosk.

Customers using the cashiers' facility were to be given a leaflet outlining the progressive reduction in opening hours and this was to commence on 1st October 2007.

The Panel however were concerned that the public should not be confused by gradually changing opening hours. This point was accepted and it was agreed that the leaflet would be re-worded accordingly.

It was also agreed that if the trial period of early closure did not meet with satisfactory customer response, then the longer opening hours would be reverted to.

v) Water Charges Review – 2007/08 (28th August 2007)

It was confirmed that the Corporate Asset Management Group would co-ordinate consumption and accounting for all charges incurred by the Council's assets. Where the review of charges results in substantial increases for Council tenants, then these will be introduced proportionately over time.

w) Cash Income – Other Licences 2007/08 (29th October 2007)

It was confirmed that it is for the provider to send renewal notifications regarding the expiry of software licences.

Having discussed the fact that there were no internal audit reports awaiting formal responses outside of the two months deadline, Members considered reducing the deadline even further. After voting on this proposal it was resolved that from the commencement of the next Municipal Year the deadline for internal audit reports awaiting formal responses be reduced to six weeks.

x) Car Allowances – Central 2007/08 (4th December 2007)

In response to questioning it was confirmed that officers should fill in forms on a regular basis or risk the effect of payments being withheld. It was therefore agreed that this be enforced.

y) The Poplars 2007/08 (4th December 2007)

z) Swimming Pools 2007/08 (4th December 2007)

aa) Leisure Centre 2007/08 (4th December 2007)

During discussions on this item Members were keen to learn whether approval had now been given for the enfranchisement of the catering facility.

bb) National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) 2007/08 (29th January 2008)

During discussions on this item it was confirmed that an on-line manual for staff would be introduced for new staff by June 2008. The Chair expressed concern over the point concerning the security of data during transfer and whether further data encryption was necessary. It was agreed that Management Team would consider what measures were necessary. However, the Vice-Chair referred specifically to the transfer of paper documents and it was agreed that a report considering the present position would be brought to a future meeting of the Panel.

cc) Payroll Central 2007/08 (29th January 2008)

In discussing this item Members heard that it had been agreed in the capital programme for the next financial year, to investigate an electronic time recording system and that, if this is adopted by the Council, a report will be put before the Policy Committee, detailing this scheme in the next Municipal year.

It was considered appropriate for the Panel to review the effectiveness of the Customer Service Centre in relation to the service provision of the departments at a future meeting of the Panel.

dd) Creditors Departmental ; Client and Contract Services (26th February 2008)
Order Procedure

During discussion on this item it was confirmed that the Integra E-Series Financial system is now fully operational in Client Services. Many of the comments applied to the situation prior to the introduction of this system. All staff had been trained in the use of this new system.

ee) Assets Fuel Stock 2007/08 (26th February 2008)

Amongst the items noted during discussion on this matter were the following:-

The audit had been carried out at the request of the department concerned and not Internal Audit. Concerns had been expressed that recommendations in the previous audit had not been implemented.

The audit contained many recommendations for implementation and it was intended to review the recommendations in April 2008 to ensure early compliance. It was requested that an update be brought before the April 2008 meeting confirming the results of this exercise.

The follow up report on this topic was duly presented to the 29th April 2008 meeting of the Panel. Members heard that the author of the report had carried out a complete walk through of the process involved in fuel stock delivery and usage at the Depot.

During discussion it was agreed that the present procedure was less than satisfactory but Members heard that research is currently being undertaken with the South Leicestershire Partnership into fleet management, which will involve fuel stocks as well. It was not an appropriate time for change, until the outcome of this investigation is known.

After discussion on the continuing inconsistencies in the dispense and calibration records it was agreed that monthly monitoring of the existing system should be carried out until the outcome of the Partnership investigations is known, which is likely to be in October 2008.

ff) Housing Repairs and Maintenance Schedule of Rates 2007/08 (26th February 2008)

gg) Debtors – Central 2007/08 (26th February 2008)

hh) Creditors Departmental – Borough Engineering 2007/08 (25th March 2008)

As with item dd) above it was confirmed that the Integra E-Series Finance System is now fully operational in Client Services. However, it was noted that in instances of unpredictable vandalism, it would still be necessary to use the old system of purchase ordering.

ii) Cash Income – Central – 2007/08 (25th March 2008)

Members felt that it would be more efficient if all post containing cheques was processed by Financial Services in order to identify any errors before these cheques are banked since the return of any incorrect cheques is more efficient than refunds being necessary when errors are discovered by the Bank. The documentation accompanying the cheque can be scanned into the IDOX System and sent to relevant departments. The Chief Executive commented that approximately 95% of cheques received were processed correctly, but that this could be looked at.

In response to a specific question, it was confirmed that payments to the Mayor's Charity were operated separately from this cash income method.

jj) Payroll – Register of Electors 2007/08 (25th March 2008)

During discussions on this item, it was accepted that the number of electors requiring postal votes could not be predicted and therefore it was not possible to accurately forecast the budget required to deal with the issue of postal votes.

kk) Council Tax – Debit 2007/08 (25th March 2008)

Members were concerned that more strenuous efforts should be made to detect potential fraud, for example, by liaising with neighbouring authorities and the Legal and Licensing Section, regarding the wording of the single person discount application forms, in order that the restrictions imposed by the Data Protection Act might be bypassed. The Internal Audit Manager confirmed that discussions would be held with the relevant parties to assess the potential for change.

The Chair referred to the relevant key performance indicator and requested that an update report be brought before the Panel. This update report was brought to the 29th April 2008 meeting of the Panel.

Members heard that the ruling regarding the legality of data use would be a national matter and not one for this Authority's individual Legal and Licensing Section to make. It was explained that considerable officer time is spent in endeavouring to check the accuracy of single occupancy. Where responses are not received to the Council's reminders, the discount is removed.

The Panel agreed on the need to establish a test case to prosecute and obtain maximum publicity in order to deter others from contemplating deception.

The use of National Insurance numbers as the most efficient means of checking an individual's records was suggested, but Members still wished the recommendations contained within the report to be given priority.

ll) Loans and Investments – Central 2007/08 (29th April 2008)

mm) Planning/Building Control Miscellaneous Income (29th April 2008)
Follow-up 2007/08

Outcome

The Scrutiny Panel has continued to maintain the high profile of the work of the Internal Audit section and it is pleasing to note that no officers have had to be called to the Panel during the year. Indeed as there have been no reports awaiting formal responses outside of the two months

deadline, then the timescale has been reduced to six weeks from the commencement of the 2008/09 Municipal year.

5. Local Transport Review

The Panel revisited this topic at its meeting held on 22nd May 2007 and heard that the Council is once again represented at meetings of the Leicestershire and Northamptonshire Railway Action Committee (LANRAC).

Members also heard about the publication of the Local Transport Bill which is the subject of a consultation exercise until August 2007. Amongst the proposals are that Local Authorities will be able to set up Passenger Transport Authorities to oversee local public transport services, and even collect fares from which commercial bus companies are then paid. However, it seemed that the main thrust of the Bill is the imposition of local congestion charges.

The Panel resolved that when further details are available, then local transport would form the subject of a further review at a future meeting.

Outcome

It is intended to establish a Transport Working Group to look into a range of transport issues within the Borough. This Group will operate through the Scrutiny Panel and will involve a range of external agencies and interested parties as necessary to help it in its work

6. New Rail Franchises

Details of the two new rail franchises affecting South Wigston station were reported to the 4th December 2007 meeting. These routes covered Leicester North and South, and Leicester to Birmingham.

The new franchises had been in operation from 11th November 2007 but no changes other than the transformation from summer to winter timetables was envisaged until the same process in December 2008.

Members were acquainted with the information regarding the proposals of Cross Country Trains relating to the Birmingham to Leicester services scheduled for June 2009. Whilst the wording of the proposals was not clear, it was evident that during off peak periods, there would be no improvement in the service at South Wigston station.

Members noted the consultation exercise and that comments on the proposals were invited by the train company, although it was noted that the deadline for this consultation had already passed. In the circumstances, Members agreed to make comments known to Cross Country Trains via the communication channels indicated in the consultation, and also to inform the County Council, as the Transport Authority, at Members' disappointment that their wish for an improved service at South Wigston station had not been recognised. Any response from either party would be reported to a future meeting of the Panel.

This item was touched upon again at the meeting held on 26th February 2008 when Members heard that no response had been received to the letter sent to the local Transport Authority, but that this would be followed up by officers.

It was also suggested that in view of the arrangements being made for the 2009 timetable, the Council should consider involving the local MP in the provision of services through South Wigston.

At the 25th March 2008 meeting the Panel discussed the response that had been received from the County Council. Members noted the potential for change following the regeneration of South Wigston, including the establishment of South Leicestershire College and it was therefore considered appropriate to ask the County Council to monitor the situation.

The Panel resolved that officers would continue to liaise with the County Council, as the Local Transport Authority, regarding the potential increase in passenger traffic following regeneration developments in South Wigston.

Outcome

This topic will be considered by the Transport Working Group referred to at item 5 above.

7. Fair Trade Status

At the 20th June 2007 meeting the Panel further discussed the subject of Fair Trade Status. During this discussion it was suggested that a special event promoting Fair Trade could be held at Brocks Hill and that this be included in the Brocks Hill progress report due to be considered at the next meeting of the Panel.

8. Brocks Hill – Progress Update

A report on the operation of the Brocks Hill Environment Centre was presented to the Panel at its meeting held on 17th July 2007.

Members were pleased to hear that the Environment Centre had been awarded Green Flag status and that funding had also been obtained for the older children's play area. The report also indicated the current position regarding Fair Trade status, as had been requested by the Panel at its previous meeting.

During the subsequent discussion further items considered included extended opening hours during the summer, the possibility of a restaurant facility for evening openings, the costs of agency staff compared to Council staff, the possibility of having work experience volunteers during the summer holidays, publicity, the realignment of cleaning costs within the Environment Centre and the need for play equipment for older children utilising the environment.

The Panel resolved that officers should investigate the potential for an expansion of the opening hours and services provided particularly in summer and evenings.

Outcome

Fair Trade goods are available at Brocks Hill as part of customer choice. The café franchise is currently being tendered and progress at Brocks Hill will be looked at again by the Panel during the next year.

9. Utilities and Fuel Consumption

At the meeting of 17th July 2007 Members received a report on the cost of consumption for the last four years and heard that the electricity and gas contract had been re-tendered on a two year period with effect from January 2007 with the prices fixed at this level.

Concern was expressed that the statistics only revealed the cost of utilities rather than the actual consumption and reference was also made to the plans recently resolved by Council to enter into the Welland Procurement Partnership, which will consider future options. The fact that the Council had also recently signed up to the Nottingham Declaration was raised. Resulting from this a strategy is currently being compiled that will consider the possibility of alternative sources of energy. Members resolved to note the report at this stage and see what the future analysis concludes.

At the 28th August meeting it was clarified that matters relating to alternative sources of energy were being addressed by the Asset Management Group on a long term basis.

Outcome

Now that the Council has signed up to the Nottingham Declaration it will be producing a Climate Change Strategy which will have a direct bearing on energy consumption in the future. The Council will continue to monitor its energy usage.

10. Customer Services Centre – Progress Report

A report on the operation of the Customer Services Centre was presented to the 17th July 2007 meeting of the Panel.

The Centre has been operational since March 2006 and has gradually expanded to include the provision of authority-wide service over time.

A discussion ensued about the service provided by the Centre and also the suitability of the current accommodation and the possibility of resiting the facility to a town centre location.

The Chair commented that the Panel would be looking to receive a further report on the situation for its October meeting. Members concurred that in the short term there were few issues for the authority, but that the situation long term was considerably more complex, with many issues.

It was explained that following a peer review of the Customer Services Centre, an action plan had been devised and following consultation with customers, it was anticipated that this would be reported to the Policy Committee.

Outcome

The action plan is due to be reported to the June 2008 meeting of the Council's Policy Committee.

11. Absence Management – Update

At the Panel meeting held on 28th August the Panel received a report on Sickness Absence Management.

Members noted that just 13 staff members on long term sickness absence represented 41% of the total sickness absence for the previous Municipal Year.

During a discussion on comparisons of sickness absence between different local authorities in Leicestershire, it was pointed out that only Oadby and Wigston had retained all of its services in-house and therefore the sickness absence figures for Contractors working on behalf of other authorities were not reflected in the overall statistics for those authorities. Despite this Members heard that this Authority's target for the number of working days lost to sickness per employee was 8.5, compared to 8.4 in the private section.

During further discussion, Members requested sight of the Absence Management Policy, and it was confirmed that new recruits are subject to a medical questionnaire and that references also seek answers regarding previous sickness absence.

After discussion it was resolved that:-

- i) Liaison would take place with Melton and Rutland local authorities for clarification regarding their low figures for the number of working days lost to sickness.
- ii) Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel would be sent a copy of the Absence Management Policy and
- iii) Details of the percentage of sickness absence occurring on Fridays and Mondays would also be sent to Members.

At the 25th September 2007 meeting the Panel heard that the figure for days lost to sickness per employee was 3.42 days which represented an annual figure of 8.38 days and that this was now within target.

Outcome

The Scrutiny Panel welcomes the improved figures for Sickness Absence and looks for the trend to continue in a downwards direction.

12. The Updated Community Plan and its Links to the LAA

At the 28th August 2007 meeting the Panel received a report on this subject.

By way of background information Members were reminded of the attempt by District Councils in Leicestershire to work together with the County Council in a partnership to carry out the scrutiny function of the Local Area Agreement. Unfortunately, there had been no progress in achieving this goal.

The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) had established the Borough-wide Community Plan but subsequent to this, the County-wide Local Area Agreement (LAA) had come into force. Since there were lots of specific strands in the LAA that the LSP should be involved in, the Community Plan action points needed to be reviewed and brought into better alignment with the LAA documents. It was agreed, therefore, that the Community Plan action points would be overhauled to ensure that it better tied into the LAA targets and that each individual partner's business plans linked directly into it.

There were therefore a number of areas which the Panel may wish to consider for future scrutiny.

During the subsequent discussion the timetable for the final report was considered and it was agreed that the Panel should re-visit this issue at the December meeting.

A further report was submitted to the 4th December 2007 meeting of the Panel. This comprehensive report set out to inform Members of the role and responsibilities of the Oadby and Wigston Local Strategic Partnership, progress, future proposals and links that the Partnership has with the Local Area Agreement for Leicestershire and the functions of working together to achieve outcomes at a local level.

Members debated this matter at great length and there was concern at the cost of this work, not only in financial terms but in officer time working towards enabling the County Council to achieve its targets to tell residents that we are going to produce better communities, which local authorities have been achieving for some time.

Other Members were concerned that only some of the partnerships were directly elected, but that most were not and therefore elected Members were being marginalised and that the funds at the disposal of these unelected partnerships appeared to be unquantifiable.

Members heard that a leaflet in plain English is intended to be published for the benefit of residents in order to explain what the proposals mean, how they will make a difference and what the outcomes will be. It was also explained that the Leader of the Council is this Authority's lead on the Local Strategic Partnership and the Local Area Agreement to ensure that this Authority has a voice and hence it was suggested that Members feed back their concerns to him.

The Chairman pointed out that the document was difficult to comprehend and Members needed more time to understand it. Further sessions in interpretation, in bite size portions was suggested. Some Members went further to suggest that formal training sessions should be set up to guide Members through each part of the procedure.

Officers reminded the Panel that the Council had no choice but to comply with this in order to achieve the new performance indicators and thus secure future funding. The Council would also be rated on its performance in the Local Area and Multi Area Agreements under the new Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) inspection methodology.

Outcome

Whilst the Chair recognises the importance of the Local Strategic Partnership and the Local Area Agreement in terms of community outcomes, it has been clearly identified that further training for Members on these topics is required.

13. Review of Refuse and Recycling Service

At the meeting of 25th September 2007 the Panel received a report on the operation of this service.

The principal focus of the subsequent discussion was the comparison of glass collection service options. Members heard that the kerbside glass collection service served approximately one third of the Borough, but that over the last two periods of budget setting, the costs associated with expanding the facility had been prohibitive. The point was also made that the new type of bottle bank was portable and could be sited wherever there was a perceived demand.

In discussing a possible Borough-wide kitchen waste collection, Members called for an early indication of the results of the trial which was being undertaken and noted that should it be decided to discontinue with the kerbside collection of glass, then the savings accruing could be utilised to expand this service.

The subject of yellow stickers for requesting new green and brown recycling bags was discussed and the Panel concurred that it was vital that the intended Recycling Promotion Officers encourage householders to continue to utilise this system, rather than rely upon visiting Council Offices to collect these. Only in this way would a realistic picture be obtained of the success or otherwise of this system.

After discussing this topic it was agreed to recommend to the Services Committee that the kerbside glass collection service be removed and the bottle bank service be extended to cover the whole Borough.

Outcome

The Scrutiny Panel will be considering this issue again at its June 2008 meeting.

14. Golf Course – Review of Progress

A report was received by the Panel at its meeting held on 25th September 2007.

Members heard that a full review of the course will be undertaken as part of the 2007/08 service plan. A thorough analysis of usage, based upon the postcodes of users, plus costing and pricing structures in a comparison with other municipal courses would be incorporated into this review. It was intended to report this to the Services Committee with full recommendations as to the way forward, early in 2008.

The Panel were therefore asked to await the outcome of the review to determine the future of the golf course and hence resolved to note the report.

Outcome

The Panel is still awaiting the outcome of the review and it is hoped that this will form part of the Leisure Usage report which is to be considered at the October 2008 meeting.

15. Leisure Connection – Review

At the meeting held on 29th October 2007 the Panel received a report on the operation of the Council's Leisure Contract which was provided by Leisure Connection.

The meeting was also attended by the Leisure Connection Contracts Manager and also the Regional Manager, who informed Members of progress made with the leisure facility since the widely publicised problems of earlier in the year. A review had been conducted of the structure of the operation and changes made. New procedures had been introduced, new training initiatives undertaken and new lines of communication opened with the Council.

The company had conducted a 'back to basics' exercise with all aspects of the operations reviewed. It had provided the opportunity for more flexible working between sites and for staff to have opportunities for further training.

It was anticipated that a marked improvement in standards would be reported by 31st December 2007. A new computer system, coupled with barriers to entry was being introduced, not only to control access and exits, thus avoiding lost income, but also to record and retain customer data. This could be used in the marketing of the services, particularly with promotional offers. It was anticipated that these would be in place by March 2008.

During discussion on this topic the catering received most attention. Leisure Connection confirmed plans to introduce new catering facilities across all these sites, with vending machines being introduced at the swimming pools. At Parklands it was intended to introduce an enclosed bar area and a continental café environment. This was proposed to be a franchise operation but under the terms of the contract approval from the Council was required before any sub-letting could take place.

A separate review under the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act was being undertaken at the Wigston Pool following a report received from the Council earlier in the year.

The Panel agreed that this situation would be reviewed again in six months time when a review of usage figures would be undertaken, and the catering facility would hopefully be resolved.

Outcome

The Panel will be revisiting this topic at its October 2008 meeting and will consider the subject of catering in March 2009.

16. Civil Parking Enforcement – Progress Report

The Panel received a report on this topic at its meeting of 29th October 2007.

Members heard that Traffic Regulation Orders in the vicinity of schools were not yet enforceable. It was proposed to introduce limited loading and unloading regulations but if the parking is deemed to be an obstruction of the highway, the Police can still take action.

A discussion took place regarding the number of successful appeals against the issue of parking tickets and it was agreed that it was too early in the lifetime of the scheme to make any definite conclusions but that this could form the subject of a report to a future meeting.

Members agreed to note the report and for this subject to be included in the annual programme for the Scrutiny Panel in the next Municipal Year.

Outcome

The Panel will be reviewing this subject again at its meeting in June 2008.

17. Review of Implementation of Gambling Legislation

The Panel received a report on this topic at its meeting held on 4th December 2007.

Members heard that the Gambling Act 2005 had only come into force on 1st September 2007, but that during the transitional period from 21st May until this date, existing commissions were able to be converted into new premises licences under the Act were there was no application for a change to the existing licence conditions. It was confirmed that there is one adult entertainment centre, one bingo premises, one racetrack and seven betting premises. All of these premises are now

licensed under the Gambling Act 2005 and none had applied for any change to their existing conditions.

Those premises having gaming machines were being inspected on an ongoing basis over time. Until the number of machines was confirmed, it was not possible to estimate exactly the potential income over the next three years, but the situation will be clearer after the expiry of the existing provisions granted by the Magistrates Court.

In order to assist the process it was suggested that Environmental Health Officers be asked to note the presence of any such machines during the course of their inspections of any such premises.

It was resolved that the report be noted and the suggestion above be acted upon.

18. Implementation of Smoke Free Workplaces Legislation

At the Panel meeting on 29th January 2008 Members received a report on the operation of this new legislation. It was explained that there was a high level of compliance which has rendered unnecessary, visits to check on premises for the sole purpose of compliance with the legislation. This purpose is served when visits are made for other purposes, at the same time.

The report was noted.

19. Assessment of Open Space and Recreational Facilities – Appointment of Consultants

This item was discussed at the 29th January 2008 meeting of the Panel. The Chair started by outlining the concern of Members, principally that this matter had taken up a disproportionate amount of Council time, and had been considered by both full Council, who had then deferred it to the Policy Committee.

The Panel heard that under Planning Policy Guidance Note 17, the Council is required to prepare an Open Space and Recreational Facilities Assessment. It was explained that the lowest bid received would not provide a fully compliant PPG17 study. The purpose of the report was therefore to seek approval not to appoint the lowest tender bid, but the lowest that could meet the requirements laid down.

In order to share the costs between different departments, the work in progress would now include an assessment of the leisure provision.

The Chief Executive concluded by saying that it had been agreed that the Management Team would oversee Committee agendas and the content of reports at the earliest opportunity to prevent a recurrence of this situation.

The report was therefore noted.

Outcome

The assessment is currently being undertaken and the Management Team are overseeing Committee Agendas.

20. Budget Setting Process

The Panel received a report on this topic at its meeting held on 29th January 2008.

The Council had received a disappointing settlement and the allocation of the new National Travel Concession will be under-funded. There was also further funding pressures from an increase in the employer's superannuation rate. In practice, this would mean an increase of around £200,000 per annum.

The next two years thereafter were also likely to be disappointing and this would make achieving the Council's medium-term financial strategy very challenging.

Reference was made to lobbying of the local MP and it was confirmed that he had already written to the Minister supporting the Council's case.

After due deliberation it was agreed that the Council would continue to make representations to Central Government about the level of its settlement.

21. Community Engagement

At its meeting held on 26th February 2008 the Panel considered the topic of Community Engagement. Mr A Robinson attended from the Leicestershire County Council in order to explain their involvement in the process to date.

He explained that there was no intention to take over or change the set up of existing Forums. The intention was to take the existing structure and build upon this across the County so that a County-wide network of local Forums would be put in place engaging residents within their Community.

It was anticipated that the way meetings were run would be varied to suit local circumstances. However, Members were concerned that the Forums should be open to all residents. It was agreed that the partnership approach was the correct one, to avoid the build up of multiple Forums.

The Chief Executive confirmed that meetings were being held with representatives of the County Council in order to enable all parties to get the most out of meetings and deliver effective outcomes.

The Chair asked that the concept of Community Forums should be further embedded into the Council's Constitution and it was agreed that the way forward was to plan the programme of the individual Forums so that a good mix of the different statutory and non statutory agencies would be able to provide a balanced agenda for future meetings.

It was therefore resolved that the Council's Constitution should be revised and this recommendation should be made to the Policy Committee.

Outcome

The Panel is pleased that the Constitution is being revised and that relationships between the County Council and Borough Council has been clarified and the way forward signposted.

22. Sensitive Issues Policy

The subject was discussed at the meeting held on 26th February 2008.

The Panel heard that the intent was to establish a system of clear communication channels between officers and Members and the Monitoring Officer and the Chief Executive. The intention is to

keep Members informed regarding the progress of exempt items into the public domain. There are of course very few instances of this and hence any system needs to be proportionate.

There is a distinction between information that is sensitive but not exempt and various practices are currently in place, particularly to notify individual Members of issues sensitive to their own ward.

A draft Media Protocol has been produced for the benefit of Members and officers and this is to go to Policy Committee for approval. It was agreed that the draft protocol would be finalised and published as soon as possible.

Outcome

The Media Protocol is to be submitted to the June 2008 Policy Committee meeting.

23. Capital Strategy Asset Management Plan and the Council's Accommodation Review

Members received a report on this subject at their meeting held on 25th March 2008.

An earlier review had taken place in 2003 and the latest position statement had been considered by the Policy Committee on 18th March 2008.

There were a number of action items for the next Municipal Year arising from the review. These concentrated particularly on the proposals for home working and shared services which needed to be sufficiently progressed in order to gauge their impact upon the Council's assets in terms of its offices.

The subsequent discussion highlighted the balance between the need for home working and the provision of quiet areas within the existing accommodation in order that officers may remain on site.

The Panel agreed to note the report and await the outcome of the detailed feasibility study arising from the report to the Policy Committee.

Outcome

This topic is still ongoing and is due to be reported on again to the Scrutiny Panel at its November 2008 meeting.

24. The Annual Governance Statement

Members received a condensed statement at their meeting held on 25th March 2008. This had also been the subject of a report considered by the Policy Committee on the 18th March 2008.

Members heard that this was something which the Council was obliged by law to undertake and represented open and transparent governance. The report was noted.

25. Complaints and Compliments

In introducing this report to the 29th April 2008 meeting, Members heard that as the Authority was still reliant upon a manual system, the full year was not incorporated in the report and that such data had only just been received.

During discussion it was confirmed that all sections of the Council complete monthly forms and are encouraged to register compliments as well as complaints. The data, however, is a collection of written complaints/compliments, and does not include telephone or interface complaints. The definition of a complaint was discussed at some length, particularly in relation to the issue of recycling bags and missed bin collections. It was suggested that, if unhappy, residents should be encouraged to write to the Authority in order that their complaint may be recorded.

In accepting the report, Members agreed that its timing should be rescheduled to May from 2009 to enable a full year's comparison to be made.

26. Member Enquiry System

When discussing this report at the 29th April 2008 meeting, the majority of Members agreed that the wealth of detail generated by the report was useful and should be retained despite the concerns at the amount of paper generated by the report.

Members agreed to renew their vigilance to endeavour to use this system in future.