

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL – DECEMBER 2007

Report by County Councillor Nigel Clarke

Introduction:

I have attended the following commitments since my last report:

- A Cabinet briefing where the main themes were an analysis of GCSE results for all Secondary Schools in Hampshire – we are a couple of % points above our group of comparator Shire Counties, but like them there is a worrying drop in performance in English & Mathematics. And, yet again, a presentation on options for bypasses – inner & outer, for Lyndhurst, see later meeting.
- A review of this year's funding & a forecast for the next three years in the light of government funding for Children & Adult Services. The cash limits are in practice set at a zero increase over the period, therefore, the challenge will be to deliver the existing level of service & forecast changes – personal budgets for care for instance, against a backdrop of external & internal cost pressures.
- Chaired the New Forest HAT meeting where our main focus was a review of forecast change in Childrens Services – the fusion of Connexions with Youth Services. The programme for change & integration is optimistic as it involves a substantial number of staff who have to be TUPE across to Hampshire & the vexed question of who pays for lease properties no longer required under the new structure. We have asked for a follow up report in April to check on progress as it affects the New Forest.
- A review of the technical options for a bypass around Lyndhurst, measures to reduce vehicle pollution & to consider the findings of a MORI poll seeking opinions on general traffic issues in & around Lyndhurst, with particular reference to a bypass. A high level technical review of various options concluded that the Parish's preferred option was the worst on technical, legal & environmental grounds, & very expensive >£50m. We concluded that further work should be done on two variants of inner bypasses & junction changes within the Town that might involve demolition of some buildings. All in all an interesting exercise but one that confirms the historical outcomes of previous attempts – not easy to solve given the nature of the location, the interlocking interests & cost. And each time the constraints that have to be resolved become more & more challenging.
- Lastly, the County Community Strategy/Community Safety Review Group – a meeting that I always feel is not very productive, which is being evidenced by the fact that a number of District based groups are being reorganised due to poor performance. Then we looked into the murky future of the new three year agreement for Local Area Agreements, their targets funding & how they will be monitored by Comprehensive Area Agreements. Another more qualitative review of how well the various Services & external agents perform against their targets; we only now have 198 of them & 35 key ones! Believe it or not this is a major improvement –there used to be hundreds & a full time industry grew up to service this monster.

Other activities:

I have also attended:

- The New Forest Access Forum at Lyndhurst where we took stock of what the group had achieved over the year – commenting & make proposals within Consultations as wide as Access to the Coast of Britain to the practicality of an exercise in establishing Lost Ways & recording them on the definitive map.

Comment:

We are invited to comment on the County & New Forest District Community Strategies & I would recommend that we look, like we did for the Local Development Framework, & make very focussed comment. There is a tendency in these documents to be very unspecific about what is to be achieved, by whom, for whom, by when & how it will be achieved & would we know if anything had happened due to our efforts.

Nigel Clarke