Partnerships Review Committee
Annual Report
2008/09

Making Wellingborough a place to be proud of

June 2009
Introduction

In this annual report you will find a summary of the work the Partnerships Review Committee has carried out in the year.

The Partnerships Review Committee is one of the two Committees the Council established in the summer of 2008 to improve the way it discharges its overview and scrutiny functions. The other Committee is the Audit and Performance Committee.

Overview and scrutiny functions were formally created by the Local Government Act 2000, as part of wider changes to the way councils made decisions. Prior to 2008, the Council had a single Committee for this purpose, called the Scrutiny Committee. This is therefore the first of what will be a series of annual reports on the work we do on your behalf.

What we do

The basic idea of overview and scrutiny is a simple one. Elected Councillors make inquiries, on behalf of the people of the Borough, to:

- Hold the Council’s policy committees to account in public
- Assist the Council in policy development and review; and
- Examine matters of wider local interest

Our particular remit covers the second and third of these aspects of overview and scrutiny, and under the Council’s Constitution our particular role is:

- To undertake reviews and make recommendations on services or activities carried out by external organisations which affect the Borough of Wellingborough or its inhabitants
- To monitor the Council’s external relations with: Other public sector/quasi public sector bodies e.g. Police, PCT, Strategic Health Authority, Voluntary sector e.g. CVS
  - Business sector e.g. Wellingborough Chamber of Commerce
  - Other tiers of local government – Northamptonshire County Council and Parish Councils within the Borough Regional and sub-regional bodies e.g. East Midlands Regional Assembly, EMDA, GOEM, East Midlands LGA, Sub-Regional Strategic Partnership, and NNDC
- The Council’s role in facilitating, developing and consolidating partnerships both statutory and non-statutory including:
  - Community Safety and Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership
  - Local Strategic Partnership
  - Wellingborough Town Centre Partnership
- Local Area Agreements and Public Service Agreements
• Communication and consultation with external agencies and the public

• Overview and Scrutiny of outside bodies on which the Council has representation including examination of the “added value” of the Council’s participation and the opportunity for appointed representatives to “feedback” to the Council on the activities of the body concerned

• Matters relating to the community leadership role and empowering communities

**Our membership**

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<th>Councillor Ken Harrington – Chairman of the Committee</th>
<th>Councillor Graham Lawman – Vice-Chairman of the Committee</th>
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<td>Councillor Jim Bass</td>
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<td>Councillor Andrew Bigley</td>
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Because we have a wide remit we take a cross-cutting rather than narrow service-based view of the conduct of the Council’s and its partners’ business, and we try to seek views from as many interested parties as necessary to get a balanced picture of the effects of policy and decision making on our local community.
The Council has established five priorities to guide it as it goes about making Wellingborough a place to be proud of. These are:

- **P**romoting high quality growth
- **R**educing crime and anti-social behaviour
- **I**mproving life chances for young people
- **D**elivering efficient and responsive services
- **E**nhancing the environment

This report groups our work under these priorities so that you can see clearly the contribution we have made via our overview and scrutiny work to ensuring that the Council and its partners have made and continue to make progress towards the outcomes the community want.

We would thank all the organisations and their representatives who attended our meeting for the way in which they co-operated with us and for the valuable insights they have given us into the work they do on behalf of the people of the Borough.

As this report shows, we have inquired into many areas this year and look forward to doing so again in 2009/10.
Promoting high quality growth

One of the key success factors here is strengthening Wellingborough town centre.

There has been some success here. For example, the town of Wellingborough has improved its position in the independent Experian Retail Ranking of towns. Wellingborough climbed from 351st to 282nd between 2001 and 2008 for similar sized town centres across the country. This is in contrast to other similar towns in the North Northamptonshire growth area, which recorded a decline. While this is good news, we recognise that more needs to be done.

For this reason, we asked the Wellingborough Town Centre Partnership to attend a meeting so that we could ensure they were making a contribution to improving the town centre and also find out about their future plans. The partnership attended our April 2009 meeting.

For those who are not aware, the aim of the Wellingborough Town Centre Partnership is to improve Wellingborough town centre for all who work, live or visit there, by making it a safe, accessible and attractive environment, through public and private partnership.

Key aspects of the Partnership’s work in the year included:

- Maintaining and encouraging public participation in the standards of the Town Centre;
- Developing the local economy and encouraging organisation participation in a variety of business opportunities and activities, including encouraging participation in the various Town Centre consultations;
- Increasing the marketing and promotion of the town centre and all of its attributes. This included production of the ‘Why Wellingborough’ brochure in conjunction with the Council, and holding and promoting events such as Continental Markets and the Parade of Power;
- Improving and promoting the level of public safety within the town centre for both businesses and community. This is done through the Wellingborough and East Northamptonshire Partners against Crime (WENPAC) scheme, Wellingborough Pub Watch scheme and the Safer Business Award successes.
- As member of the Crime and Reduction Partnership, the TCP had been involved in the introduction of the Alcohol Free Zone.

The work of the partnership has had a positive impact, which has been recognised in their winning of Safer Business and Building Safer Communities awards, for which achievements we congratulated them.

Looking forward, we asked the partnership what they planned to do in the future to build on these achievements.
The partnership told us that it has a three-year business plan (to March 2012) which contains four themes. These are:

- Supporting investment and development;
- Working towards a clean and safe environment,
- Accessibility improvements and
- Marketing / promotion of the town centre.

We asked the partnership what aspects of each theme in the plan they intended to prioritise in 2009/10. The partnership told us they had yet to identify these, but that when they had done so, they would report back to the Council. We shall follow this up in 2009/10 and look into the progress made towards delivering these actions.

As a result of our discussions we asked the partnership to consider a number of issues which we believed would enhance their work. These are:

- Developing their relationship with the Chamber of Commerce
- Ensuring the Heritage Trail features where appropriate in marketing and promotional material
- A co-ordinated PR initiative to publicise the town centre as a safe environment, in liaison with the Council’s Consultation and Communications Officer and the press to help increase both the daytime and evening economy.
- Updating their website

We also took the opportunity to seek the partnership’s views on a number of issues. The first was vacant properties within the town centre and proposed change of use to bring them back into productive use. The partnership told us that the vacancy situation in Wellingborough is not as bad as it might appear at first sight. Perceptions tend to be affected by the prominence of the relatively small number of premises in the town that have remained empty for many years. This leads to successes, such as the increase in occupation in Oxford Street being overlooked. We were told that if the Council wants to encourage vitality and diversity in the town centre then it does need to have a more flexible planning policy over change of use.

The second was parking restrictions, loading bays and the state of the roads within the town centre.

The third was occupancy levels for both retail and industrial sectors in Wellingborough. The partnership’s view was that Wellingborough’s position was not vastly different from that in other similar places. A key factor is confidence and they believe that if Wellingborough is to do better than other places in increasing occupancy concerted effort needs to be made by all involved parties at all times to focus on the positives rather than the negatives of Wellingborough. In relation to this we told the partnership the Council’s Consultation and Communications Officer was preparing a Communication Plan for the Council, which would include working with the press on a proactive basis to raise the profile of Wellingborough.
Reducing crime and anti-social behaviour

Crime and anti-social behaviour is a particular concern for our community. This is why its reduction along with reducing fear of crime and anti-social behaviour is one of the Council’s priorities.

To do this successfully we need to have strong and effective partnerships with a wide variety of people and organisations, but especially those organisations that are in the ‘front line’ of dealing with those issues.

One issue of particular local concern is the increase in incidents of wheeled bins being set alight. One of the consequences of these mindless acts was the tragic death of a young child on the Hemmingwell Estate. With this sad event in mind we asked the Northamptonshire Arson Task Force to come to one of our meetings so that we could find out what steps they were taking to tackle this issue. The task force attended our October 2008 meeting.

The Arson Task Force is a partnership between Northamptonshire Police and Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue, which was formed in 2004 following national study into arson in the UK.

They told us that the Safer Communities Teams had obtained excellent intelligence indicating where offenders were operating enabling particular areas to be targeted. The task force had been able to reduce the incidence of arson in the Wellingborough area from 428 in 2006/07 to 318 in 2007/08, notwithstanding the increase in wheeled bin fires. They assured us that they would continue to work to educate, eliminate, detect, investigate and prosecute offenders to reduce and eliminate the setting of deliberate fires.

A considerable amount of work has been undertaken in the Hemmingwell and Queensway areas with CCTV cameras being placed on lampposts as a preventative measure.

To focus on the issue of wheeled bin fires a countywide initiative has been launched reminding residents of the potential danger of wheeled bin fires and urging them not to put bins out the night before collection day and encouraging lids to be closed. The campaign is called ‘Remember Callum’ in memory of Callum Bland the three year old who died. We would record our thanks to his family for allowing his name to be used to remind people of the dreadful consequences that bin fires can have.

The task force also told us that wheeled bin fire incidents are now recorded separately from other types of arson by the fire service, and Wellingborough police are now treating any wheelie bin fire as a crime automatically. The purpose of this is so the problem can be monitored more effectively, and more resources directed towards tackling it.

We however note that despite these efforts, there continues to be an increase in incidents of wheeled bin fires in Wellingborough and this is an issue we shall be looking into again in 2009/10.
Improving life chances for young people

This priority was a particular focus of interest for us in 2008/9. We paid particular attention to this area because of the poor level of educational achievement in the Borough. There has been a downward trend in Key Stage 4 achievement in the Borough, which needs to be addressed, with results below the County and National average as the following shows.

We began by asking the Wellingborough Education Partnership (WEP) to attend a meeting of the Committee to explain what they do and how their work will make a difference to the situation. They attended our December 2008 meeting for this purpose.

The aim of the partnership is to work “together for the future well-being of every learner in our community”. The partnership is for all educational settings for young people between the ages of 10 and 19 and seeks to improve educational standards and opportunities for life-long learning. Its aspiration is to raise educational standards at least in line with national expectations.

All educational settings are members, and Head teachers are members of the Management Board. A Steering Group had been established to represent each phase and lead on decision-making. WEP hopes to work in partnership with the Council developing consistency of approach across the town with education and other agencies to establish strong links to achieve a better future for every young person.

Five priorities had been established, these are:

- Standards
- Transition
- 14-19 Well-being
- Behaviour
• Healthy Schools

We asked WEP a number of questions about its work and as a result suggested that it should seek a higher profile in the local media. We also suggested that it needed input from a wider range of interested groups such as the Youth Forum and Youth Parliament and that it contact the Council’s with Neighbourhood Development team to obtain contact details for organisations engaged with various community groups within the Borough.

Following on from this we decided to look more closely at educational attainment in the Borough and one of our members, Councillor Bass engaged in extensive fact-finding, including discussions with the Head teachers of the Wellingborough and Wollaston secondary Schools, the Director of the Tresham College, Council officers, the County Council’s Director of Children and Schools and the County Council’s youth service.

This work found that there were many other organisations involved in the education of our young people, outside of conventional educational settings. For example, in sports, our own Sports Development Officer links with all schools via the Wellingborough School Sports Partnership. Similarly, there is involvement through the Council’s involvement through the Prosper Group of the Wellingborough Partnership.

The Council is also actively engaged with young people’s education via the Work Experience and Work Placement schemes and Modern Apprenticeships are also used within the Council.

Councillor Bass, together with Councillor Lawman, then worked with Council officers to produce a report on their findings, which was discussed at our April 2009 meeting. Our discussions were assisted by input from Councillor Pursglove, Chairman of the Youth Advisory Panel. It was agreed that the report would be considered by the Youth Advisory Panel and the Youth Council to ensure a consistent approach was achieved and momentum was not lost.

The report highlighted a number of specific factors that contribute to the level of educational attainment and school performance in Wellingborough compared to other places in Northamptonshire. These include:

• Some specific groups of children are under performing in comparison to their peers including Looked After Children, some Black Minority Ethnic groups and white British boys from more disadvantaged backgrounds.
• Deprivation is similarly a factor - there is a significant correlation between individual school performance and the levels of deprivation experienced by their pupils.
• Parental support and parent attitudes to education, learning and aspirations.
• Levels of ambition, aspiration and discipline.
We discussed how the Council as a key partner might assist schools, the Local Education Authority and other partners to improve the levels of aspiration and attainment levels of young people. It was agreed that given the importance of the issue the Wellingborough Partnership Steering Group should take the lead in discussing and addressing the suggestions raised in this report. These suggestions were:

- Assisting in promotional activities for young people and promotion of more positive role models
- Promoting involvement in the School Council / Governing Body of Secondary schools – perhaps promoting homework clubs.
- ‘Buddying’ by responsible adults and Councillors to local schools / school councils to become more involved in their activities and achievements. From the Council’s perspective we felt this could be an excellent way to promote greater understanding of the work of the Council (especially during Local Democracy Week and like events) and would assist the Council’s understanding of the kinds of activities / services that young people need both inside and outside of school.
- Assisting schools in the review and promotion of their Home-School Agreements – particularly to emphasise the parent / carer’s key role in their children’s education
- Raising awareness about training / apprenticeship / job opportunities and careers available in the modern world – including promotion of the Hemmingwell Skills Centre.
- Assisting in the promotion of more positive role models – e.g. local people who have been/are successful business people. Linking with Northamptonshire Enterprise Ltd’s Young Ambassadors scheme to provide positive role models
- Assisting in the promotion of local sportsmen and women with a defined role in education/coaching. Promoting the ethos “Fit in Body Fit in Mind”.
- Instilling an increased feeling of Civic Pride amongst young people as a way of reducing levels of litter and graffiti and reducing the fear of crime.
- Promoting use of the Castle Theatre by School /Youth groups. Using professional entertainers as role models.
- Promoting pathways to NVQ educational qualifications and graduate level education.
- Promoting faculties/schools of Excellence such as that the College of Motorsport at Silverstone and by way of example a school of Aviation at Sywell.
- Consider existing links (Prosper Group / WEP) and / or new “group/committee” to act as Partnership link: Education to Council, possible title Wellingborough Education Business Partnership.

We shall be doing more work on this issue in 2009/10.

We also looked at what other organisations are doing to improve life chances for pre-school age children and their families. The Penrith Drive Children’s
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Centre and the Wellingborough and District Home-Start attended our January 2009 meeting to discuss their work.

The Penrith Drive Children’s Centre began as the Sure Start Local Programme for Wellingborough in 2002 and became a children’s centre in August 2007. It is one of a network of four Children’s Centres in the town of Wellingborough; the others being the Croyland, Oakway and Highfield Children’s Centres.

Children’s Centres provide a range of services to children under five during term time (and up to eight years of age during school holidays) and their families. These services include:

• Early education integrated with childcare (Enjoy and achieve) – stay and play sessions; family learning courses including crèches; Dads and working parents’ group; toy library; linked childminders; childminders’ drop in, Ruskin childcare and rhymetime.

• Health services (Be healthy) – antenatal support; baby weighing clinic; breastfeeding support; baby massage; speech and language; home safety; smoke free homes and paediatrician clinic.

• Family support services (Stay safe) – individual family support; play ideas; parenting courses; home safety packs; parenting workshops and young parents’ group.

• Employment and training advice (Make a positive contribution) - work with Jobcentreplus; volunteering opportunities and IT support.

• Information and advice services (Achieve economic wellbeing) – Citizens Advice Bureau sessions; families information service; relate counselling; links to Connexions; budgeting advice; signposting and domestic violence counselling.

The success of the Penrith Drive Centre has been achieved through the high level of involvement within the local community, an established programme of activities; experienced and well qualified staff; fully integrated volunteers; young parents actively engaging with the programme and partnerships with a range of organisations.

We asked what issues the Centre faces at present in improving what it does for the community and were told that particular challenges are:

• Transition of budgets from the Sure Start Local Programme to the Children’s Centre

• Establishing effective baseline data to enable accurate monitoring of progress in engaging with traditionally excluded groups

• Moving to an outcomes based model of measuring children and families individual progress

• Integrating Children’s Centres with existing education and health provision.

Home-Start uses a network of trained local parent volunteers to offer support, friendship and practical help to families with at least one child under the age of five years living within the Borough of Wellingborough, primarily through home-visiting but also through Family Support Groups, which are based at the
St Andrew’s Community Hall and the Salvation Army community rooms in the town centre.

We asked how people are referred to the scheme and were told that it is by both self-referral and by other agencies such as health visitors, social workers, Women’s Aid and schools. Referrals also come from Children’s Centres.

We found out that the scheme supports families who
- Feel isolated through having no family support, perhaps because they are new to the area, or because of family relationship difficulties
- Are experiencing post-natal conditions
- Are coping with illness or bereavement
- Need to develop ‘parenting-skills’ or are finding it difficult to cope with the demands of twins, triplets or a large young family
- Need practical help in budgeting, nutrition, meal planning and making their home safe.

We asked about the range of activities provided to families and learned that these include a summer playscheme, outings and parties.

Both organisations told us that additional community facilities are required to support and enhance the work they and others do and this is a matter the Council’s Community Committee will have regard to.
Delivering efficient and responsive services

Here we looked into the work of both public and third sector partner organisations providing services to the people of the Borough.

At our October 2008 meeting we inquired into the work of the Nene Valley Citizens’ Advice Bureau, paying particular attention to how they are supporting the people of the Borough in the current recession.

The Bureau in Wellingborough offers a ‘drop in’ service, general advice appointments, money and debt advice, benefit checks, legal and employment surgeries, home visits, information and signposting and referrals. They also work in partnership with a large London firm, Law 4 all, and also with Welfare Rights, Debt and Housing and Victim Support.

The Bureau employs 8 paid staff, 8 general advisors, 3 debt advisors, 6 trainee advisors, 8 general trainees and 3 advice support workers.

We found out that between April and September 2008, 954 clients, presenting 2646 issues had been dealt with at the Wellingborough branch. This included 790 debt issues totaling £1.4 million. Other queries presented included, 593 relating to benefits, 341 relating to employment, 198 relating to relationships and 172 relating to housing. As a result of the recession:

- There had been a significant increase in queries, particularly around homelessness and rent and mortgage debts.
- More queries than normal had been received from the older age group who were struggling to manage particularly regarding the benefits they were entitled to claim. There had also been an increase in employment enquiries with concern over future unemployment and over the increase in fuel costs.
- Repossession cases had increased although courts were giving more time for debts to be paid.
- Non-priority debt collection was being accelerated with bailiffs being used more quickly and more frequently.

We learned that improvements to the way in which the Bureau provided access to advice were being implemented with gateway interviews, self-help information, telephone advice, partnership working and two newly introduced electronic self-service kiosks. Another such kiosk would soon be located in Wellingborough town centre.

A translation service was also available by telephone or by making an appointment and advice guidance was produced in different languages.

The Bureau had made a successful lottery bid for additional funding, along with a number of other providers, and would be receiving additional funding equating to £12,000 per annum for 3 years.

The Bureau agreed with us that demand on the services they provide would unfortunately continue to increase as the recession worsened.
For our meeting in December 2008 we invited the Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service to attend so that we could discuss and comment on its Draft Strategic Plan 2009-2012 and the related Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).

We found out that the main aims of the Service are as follows:
- Reducing the number of fires and other emergency incidents occurring
- Reducing loss of life in fires and other emergency incidents
- Reducing the number and severity of injuries occurring in fires and other emergencies
- Reducing the commercial, economic and social impact of fires and other emergency incidents
- Safeguarding the environment and heritage (both built and natural)
- Providing communities with value for money

The strategic plan had been reviewed in May 2008 to take into account the statutory requirement of prevention activity. The proposed objectives of the plan were now:
1. To enhance the Service’s preventative, protective and intervention work within Northamptonshire’s communities.
2. Maximising capacity providing value for money.
3. Developing a competent workforce living our values.

We found out that objective 1 is aimed at reducing avoidable injuries, delivering community safety initiatives, enhancing the availability of operational personnel, ensuring effective and efficient responses to the range of incidents expected to be encountered.

The service relies heavily on retained fire fighters to maintain its capacity but that it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit.

Objective 2 is aimed at securing efficiency through strict budget control; partnership working and introduction of a Regional Control Centre as set out in the central government plan for fire and rescue services nationally.

Historically the Service had always been one of the cheapest in the Country but this had changed recently as a result of the introduction of additional statutory regulations.

A considerable amount of Partnership working was already being undertaken. Examples of this were with the elderly or disabled where preventative measures, such as the fitting of smoke detectors could ensure that swift action was taken to save a life in the event of a fire.

We discussed with the Service the impact on their resources of additional homes planned for the Borough and were told that this had been taken into account when the new plan was drafted. We were informed that new properties were generally safer than existing houses as regulatory standards had improved in recent years and a range of preventative measures together with smoke detectors were usually provided.
One the biggest changes would be the implementation of the regional call centres across the country, anticipated to be operational in 2011. This was expected to be a huge communications exercise in informing the public that this would improve the service and give more effective and resilient control rooms. We suggested that the Service submit an article for use in the Council newspaper, The Link, as one method of communicating this to all residents in the Borough.

Our inquiries revealed that a particular challenge for objective 3 was making the workforce more diverse. Currently the level of women and minority ethnic employees was at 2% in Northamptonshire and there were similar figures across the country. Over 2,000 applications had been received during a recent recruitment campaign in Northamptonshire so it was believed that working for the Service remained a sought after career.

At our May 2009 meeting we inquired into the work of the Volunteer Centre. We found out that its role is no longer one of matching volunteers to organisations. That role now sits with the Nene Valley Community Action organisation.

The Volunteer Centre now focuses on providing the following community transport services:-

- Medical car service by voluntary drivers using their own cars to support the health and wellbeing of the residents of Wellingborough
- Wheels within wheels to help the disabled to access the services they needed
- Wellibus, a fully accessible dial-a-ride minibus service, which provided a lifeline, reduced isolation and supported local businesses
- Shopmobility through the hire of electric scooters, wheelchairs and shopping trolleys to provide people with limited mobility with the opportunity to shop in Wellingborough town centre and to retain their independence

We discovered that the County Council had carried out a gap analysis of transport and volunteer drivers some eighteen months ago. We asked if the results were available. We were told that the centre did not know and it was agreed that the Council’s Community Development team would be approached to see if they could obtain the results.

The centre participated in a National Shopmobility day on 15 May 2009, and arrangements were made for the Mayor to attend to support the event.

Under this priority heading we also include the work we did to scrutinise the Northamptonshire Local Area Agreement and the Wellingborough Partnership, though we recognise that the work of these bodies impacts on all our priorities.

Because these bodies are closely linked we dealt with them both at our meeting in February 2009.
The Northamptonshire Local Area Agreement commonly referred to as the LAA, is a three year agreement covering the period 2008 - 2011 that sets out the 'deal' between central government and local authorities and their partners to improve services and the quality of life for local people. The LAA is a key delivery mechanism for local priorities identified in Northamptonshire’s various Sustainable Community Strategies. Local authorities and their public sector partners are under a duty to co-operate to agree LAA targets and to have regard to them in exercising their day-to-day functions. It is therefore an important agreement, with wide ranging impacts on the Borough. This is why we wanted to scrutinise what had been achieved.

The LAA is governed by the Northamptonshire Public Service Board (PSB), which is supported by the Chief Executives Group and the Partnership Support Unit – an arms length support unit hosted by the County Council to support the development and implementation of the LAA and its performance management arrangements. Five ‘delivery’ Boards - the Health and Well-being Board, the Safer Stronger Communities Board, Regeneration and Growth Board, Economic Development Board and the Children and Young People’s Board, each attended by Council representatives - operate across the whole LAA, each responsible for co-ordinating and commissioning activity designed to meet the targets set within the agreement.

The priorities in the LAA for Northamptonshire are these:
- Stronger empowered and cohesive communities
- Improved adult health and well being
- Improved life chances for children and young people
- A stronger local economy
- Building safer communities
- Improved environmental sustainability
- Tackling exclusion and promoting equalities

We asked the Council’s representative on the LAA partnership to tell us what progress the LAA had made towards achieving its priorities. We found out that the LAA partnership has made limited progress to date. New arrangements are in place but are relatively new and are yet to become fully embedded. As a result, progress on joint working and delivery plans has been slower than expected and little progress has been made towards the re-alignment of available resources to focus effort on the priorities.

We were told that of the LAA’s 35 designated targets:
- 9 were on track to meet or exceed the levels of ambition as agreed in the signed LAA
- 11 were off trajectory, but expected to improve over the period and to meet expectation
- 2 were at risk of missing agreed levels of ambition
- 13 had no data on which to evidence progress (9 where target setting has been deferred and 4 where no data is available)
We asked why a number of targets had no performance to report and were told that baselines needed to be set or relevant data collected and consideration also needed to be given as to how best to disaggregate targets and performance information to local level. We were told that performance Management systems have been slow to develop, principally due to the delay in establishing the new Northamptonshire Partnership Support Unit and the time taken to imbed their common performance management system – known as Performance Plus. The LAA partnership has now recognised the need for more investment in Performance Management systems and additional resources have been made available to the Partnership Support Unit to help with this set-up.

It was agreed that progress on delivery plans has been disappointing overall. Although the economic and environment themes were well advanced and demonstrated a high degree of cross partnership working and cooperation. Others themes had been slow to develop and several delivery plans, originally scheduled to be completed in October, remained incomplete.

In the light of this position we asked that representatives from the five ‘delivery’ Boards and the Partnership Support Unit be requested to attend future meetings to provide an update on the progress towards preparation of theme delivery plans and the delivery of the wider LAA priorities and outcomes so that we could be assured that the LAA partnership was being effective.

The Wellingborough Partnership is the Local Strategic Partnership for the Borough of Wellingborough. A Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) is a non-statutory body that brings together the different parts of the public, private, voluntary and community sectors, working at a local level, to create a shared vision and shared sense of priorities for a place.

The Partnership does not deliver services itself but brings together a number of organisations and local representatives under the leadership of the Borough Council to deliver the outcomes established in the Sustainable Community Strategy. The Partnership includes community groups, local authorities, business, police, health, the voluntary sector and other public sector agencies.

The roles of the Council with its LSP partners are summarised below:

- Exercise a leadership and governing role through identifying and articulating the needs and aspirations of local communities and reconciling or arbitrating between competing interests
- Have oversight of and coordinate community consultation and engagement activities of individual partners and where appropriate combine them
- Produce a Sustainable Community Strategy based on data and evidence from the local area and its population, to establish a shared local vision and priorities for action
- Contribute to the production of a county-wide Local Area Agreement (LAA), based on the priorities identified in the area’s Sustainable Community Strategy.
Community Strategies

- Have oversight of the planning and alignment of resources in the locality (where relevant to delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategies and LAA) in order to achieve more effective and efficient commissioning and ultimately better outcomes
- Review and performance manage progress against the priorities and targets agreed in the LAA and ensure delivery arrangements are in place.

Like the Northamptonshire LAA, the Partnership is an important body, the work of which has wide ranging impacts on the Borough. This is why we wanted to scrutinise what was being achieved.

The primary purpose of the Wellingborough Partnership is to oversee delivery of the objectives of the Wellingborough Sustainable Community Strategy on behalf of the wider community.

Governance of the Partnership was the role of the Partnership Steering Group, which is now chaired by Councillor Paul Bell and vice-Chaired by Mrs Anne Toms from the Voluntary/Community sector. The Steering Group, which met quarterly, was charged with the task of taking the lead in developing the Partnership and monitoring the work of Partnership’s six themed task groups, each of which concentrates its efforts on one of the Sustainable Community Strategy's six priority areas.

These task groups are:

- Better - Environmental, cultural, transport and leisure issues; working to improve the quality of life for residents. Also will work to create a vibrant and sustainable voluntary sector that can meet the needs of vulnerable people
- Children and Young Persons - Addressing the needs of the young people in the Borough to ensure that they can achieve and thrive in the future
- Healthier - Active living, concerned with improving the health of residents. This also includes meeting the needs of Older People both in health and quality of life issues
- Neighbourhoods - Working to improve the quality of life for residents in both urban and rural areas. Promoting community cohesion and equalities.
- Prosper - Economic development concerned with improving the economy of the Borough
- Safer - Concerned with improving community safety in the Borough. This group is also the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP)

The Steering Group has 19 members drawn from Business, Community, Education, Growth, Health, Local Councils, Police, and Social Housing. The Steering Group's focus in 2009 was to:-
• continue linkage of the new Wellingborough Community Strategy with that for the County during the refreshing of both
• establish linkage between the Wellingborough Partnership and the Northamptonshire Partnership
• improve the linkage between the Wellingborough Partnership and the Borough Council
• align the Action Plan targets with the Northamptonshire Local Area Agreement with agreement on who leads on which
• delivery of the Groups’ Action Plans through a new Performance Management system
• monitor the Growth in North Northamptonshire

Councillor Paul Bell attended and told us that as part of the initiatives being taken to improve governance of the Partnership and to improve the delivery of the Group Action Plans, the Steering Group would now receive at each of its meetings a report from each Group summarising that group’s activities and achievements in the preceding quarter and highlighting areas of concern. In addition, two Groups would report in detail on their activities and have their work reviewed by the Steering Group.

We also learned that the Wellingborough Partnership was to hold a ‘Recession to Recovery’ conference in March 2009, to identify and discuss actions and interventions that the Partnership and the wider community could apply to support the residents and businesses of the Borough through the recession.

As with the Northamptonshire LAA, we shall scrutinise the work of the Partnership carefully during 2009/10.
Enhancing the environment

The Council’s focus in this area is not just on the conventional built and natural environments but also on working with our community and partners to create a Borough with an attractive and desirable community environment so that, amongst other things, we have a community which has access to opportunities that assist wellbeing through physical activities, cultural and leisure pursuits. It was on this aspect that we focused our inquiries in 2008/9.

Here we looked into the work of two complementary organisations – the Council’s Glamis Hall Day Centre and Pravasi Mandal.

The Glamis Hall Day Centre attended our meeting in January 2009. The centre provides a range of activities for elderly people. People attend because they may be in need of company, or they may attend in order to give their carers a break. Part of the centre is also available for hire by members of the community.

We were particularly interested in the care and wellbeing services provided to elderly people and learned that alongside social and leisure activities such as flower arranging, darts, skittles, dominoes, beetle drives, bingo, quizzes, painting, card games, outings and parties, the centre offers a range of care and wellbeing treatments such as amchair exercises, assisted bathing, hairdressing, manicures and facial massage.

The centre also offers users lunch and can cater for individual dietary needs such as diabetic, low fat and soft diet. The centre holds a Northamptonshire Heartbeat Award. The Heartbeat Award is a nationally recognised award given to caterers who demonstrate a commitment to customer care through the provision of a healthier environment and healthier food choices.

Transport to and from the centre is available to people who either cannot walk to the centre or have no other means of transport.

As a result of our inquiries we concluded that the Council’s Older People Working Group should consider how the Glamis Hall Day Centre could provide an enhanced service to elderly people and report their findings to the Community Committee.

Pravasi Mandal attended our May 2009 meeting.

Pravasi Mandal has been operating in Wellingborough since 1984. Its main aim is to improve the lives of elderly and disabled members of the community, with a particular focus on the needs of the Asian community in the Borough. The organisation provides:

- day centre activities such as keep fit, yoga, tai chi and Indoor games such as bowling, card games and darts
- caring support to meet special needs
- workshops/lectures through Age Concern, social care and Primary Care Trust on independent healthy living
• outings to country parks, religious places, the seaside and historical places
• opportunities to socialise with peer groups
• advice on public services such as social and care services
• freshly prepared vegetarian meals for consumption on the premises or delivery to customer’s homes
• a gujarati library
• transport

The premises are also available for hire by all members of the community.

The centre aims to provide additional care and support for the community in their own homes and to increase the day care facilities into evenings and weekends.

We learned that grant funding obtained from the National Lottery and Age Concern had enabled the Centre to purchase two mini buses and that the centre’s kitchen had received the Northamptonshire Heartbeat Award since 2002.

We also learned that the centre has obtained planning permission to extend the premises to meet increased demand.

However, our inquiries revealed that the centre faces an uncertain future because of changes in the way Northamptonshire County Council will be funding adult social care arrangements. The current Northamptonshire County Council funding arrangement was due to cease from October 2009 and the centre had been invited and had put forward a bid application for funding for 18 months from that date under the new arrangements. However, the results of that bid would not be known until September 2009. If the bid is unsuccessful the centre would have to give serious consideration to ceasing its activities.

We suggested that the centre approach the Council’s Community Development Service to explore the possibilities of partnership working, to assist in lobbying the County Council and the provision of support to apply for grant funding from elsewhere should the County Council bid prove to be unsuccessful.

Cessation of the services provided by the centre would be a loss to the local community and we shall be monitoring events closely as they unfold in 2009/10.