



# Partnerships Review Committee Annual Report 2009/10

Making Wellingborough a place to be proud of

June 2010

## Introduction

In this section of the 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 Performance and Scrutiny Committee (previously known as the Audit and Performance Committee).

## 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 during the year**

Councillor Ken Harrington – Chairman of the Committee



Councillor Graham Lawman – Vice-Chairman of the Committee



Councillor Jim Bass



Councillor Ruth Bell



Former Councillor Andrew Bigley  
(Left the Council in 2009)



Councillor George Blackwell



Councillor Barry Graves



Councillor Robert Hawkes  
(Joined the Committee in October 2009)



Councillor Bhupendra Patel  
(Left the Committee in 2009)



Councillor John Raymond  
(Joined the Committee in May 2010)



Councillor Maureen Shram



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 2010/11.

## Promoting high quality growth

Growth is a complex and contentious issue and one that involves a multiplicity of parties. To ensure we had a proper understanding of work that is carried out collaboratively to help achieve the spatial and economic development aspirations established for the sub-region in which the Borough sits – North Northamptonshire – we asked the three leading agencies to attend our September 2009 meeting. These agencies are:

- North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit (NNJPU) - the body set up in 2004 by Corby, Kettering, East Northamptonshire and Wellingborough councils along with the county council to deliver a Core Spatial Strategy and associated planning documents for the area. It provides the strategic planning framework within which our own local planning documents sit.
- Northamptonshire Enterprise Ltd (NEL) - the countywide economic development body set up in 2006 from the merger of 5 existing bodies. It is a company limited by guarantee funded by the county council, all the district and borough councils in Northamptonshire, central government and East Midlands Development Agency. Half of its Board is drawn from the private sector. Its role is to coordinate delivery against the Sub Regional Economic Strategy.
- North Northamptonshire Development Company (NNDC) - an Urban Development Company created in 2006 from the merger of Catalyst Corby and North Northants Together into one delivery vehicle. It is funded by Corby, Kettering, East Northamptonshire and Wellingborough councils, the county council and central government. Its remit is to help programme and deliver the growth that has been set out as part of the Sustainable Communities Strategy.

We learned that the main role of the NNJPU is to support the work of the North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Committee, which was established in 2005 as the statutory planning authority responsible for considering strategic spatial planning issues for North Northamptonshire.

The NNJPU also co-ordinates the production of joint planning documents and joint technical studies, the latter of which we learned have produced an extensive evidence base to support planning activity. The NNJPU also co-ordinates infrastructure planning; responds to consultations; and provides advice on plans and major applications, urban design and sustainability.

We learned that NEL's key roles are to lead and influence economic strategy and policy; achieve business growth, economic diversification and high levels of competitiveness; create a sustainable, dynamic and flexible labour market; support and enhance community cohesion; work in partnership to achieve shared goals and develop and promote a strong Northamptonshire brand; attract and retain more high value businesses.

The main role of NNDC is to secure sustainable social, physical, and economic growth in North Northamptonshire, and to do this while maintaining high environmental standards and quality of life. To do this, they assist local regeneration schemes; promote North Northamptonshire as a location and

secure public and private commitment to investment. We learned that they also fund economic development and inward investment through NEL.

As a result of questions to these organisations we were able to satisfy ourselves that they had good collaborative working arrangements in place that avoided duplication, and that each was democratically accountable although we did express concerns as to the level of engagement with voluntary sector and community organisations on the part of NEL and NNDC.

So we could be satisfied the Council is receiving value for money for its contribution to these organisations and existing residents are not benefitting from growth we asked them to provide to the relevant Officers comparative data with other district and borough authorities so the Council could see what each authority has gained as a result of their contributions in terms of inward investment and increases in skills levels.

The Council regards the provision of infrastructure for jobs led growth as fundamental to achieving a prosperous and vibrant local economy. Accordingly, we asked them to ensure that adequate attention is paid to preparing for increased use of the A45, A14 and A43 and more specifically identified the need for a grade separated interchange on the A45 as a replacement for the Wilby Way roundabout.

We also asked them to ensure that proper consideration was given to re-allocation of government Growth Area Funding to attract the investment needed to bring forward the Council's public realm strategy for Wellingborough town centre and to work with us to obtain funding from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to enable the development of Stanton Cross to get underway.

In the light of our discussions and questions we decided that the following issues needed to be drawn to the attention of the relevant policy committees of the Council:-

- The urgent need to implement the proposals to upgrade the A45 in the Wellingborough area
- The need for infrastructure planning to allow for the affects of growth on the A45, A14 and A43
- The need to press the HCA and others for funding to enable development of Stanton Cross to begin
- The need to support bids for funding aimed at implementing the public realm strategy for Wellingborough town centre
- The need to prepare bids for funding for projects which complement both the Council's 2020 Vision and the sub-regional investment plan
- The need to improve the level of engagement of voluntary and community sector representatives with NEL and NNDC

One of the key things we wish to see as a result of our work on this priority is a strong and vibrant Wellingborough town centre.

For this reason, we again asked the Wellingborough Town Centre Partnership to appear before us so that we could further inquire into their activities and ensure they were carrying through on the issues we inquired into when they last attended in April 2009. They came to our February 2010 meeting.

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.

In April 2009, the Partnership told us that their business plan has four main themes:

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

We therefore enquired into the progress they have made in delivering these and found that the themes had been refined into the following:

- Business Community and Environmental;
- Investment/Development/Access and Corporate;
- Publicity/Marketing/Promotions and Events; and
- Business Security and Community Safety.

From the presentation made by the Partnership and our questions we learned that progress was mixed save in the area of Business Security and Community Safety.

A major area of concern in the Business Community and Environmental Theme was delay on the part of the Highways authority in addressing issues around parking regulation. We shared this concern and asked the Council's Development Committee to become involved.

A success under this theme was an educational/promotional anti-litter campaign targeted at fast-food outlets, during the evening/night time economy. All outlets within the town centre were visited in November 2009 by the Town Centre Manager and the Council's environmental wardens. Businesses were asked to follow a voluntary code-of-conduct in dealing with waste and that of their customers with a view to reducing/eliminating littering.

These are both areas we shall follow up when we next meet with the Town Centre Partnership.

Implementation of the Investment/Development/Access and Corporate theme activities was affected by the recession with the result that little inward investment activity was taking place. To help local businesses weather the recession we learned that a town centre business guide had been produced and distributed to town centre businesses and that the Partnership had actively supported the Council's 'shop local' scheme for the pre-Christmas period.

In respect of the Publicity/Marketing/Promotions and Events theme we learned that activities are happening on an ongoing basis. The most notable of these was the Parade of Power, now in its fifth year. Other examples were increasing safety awareness for shoppers by issuing hand and shopping bag alarms in conjunction with the Swansgate Centre and Police, and publicity

concerning the donation made to All Hallows church of £200 towards maintenance of the church tower clock.

Less successful was efforts to hold festival events in the town. An Italian food festival was held over two days in October 2009 but efforts to hold others were unsuccessful. An area of concern drawn to our attention is the charge payable for such events under the street trading arrangements the Council has in force. In light of the forthcoming World Cup the Partnership told us they welcome dialogue with the Council on the possible provision of a large media TV screen in the town centre which could be used to show matches. We asked the Council's Resources Committee to look into both these issues.

The Partnership's work under its Business Security and Community Safety theme had produced positive results with retail crime levels falling. A particular area of success is the Pub Watch scheme which has led to a number of undesirable persons being excluded from licensed premises in the town centre.

The Partnership also told us of their progress with plans to bring forward proposals for a ballot on a Business Improvement District (BID) for the town with support from the East Midlands BID Academy. A BID is a precisely defined geographical area within which the businesses have voted to invest collectively funds raised through a levy in local improvements to enhance their trading environment.

As a result of questions we learned that

- It was anticipated that all businesses would make a contribution but the amount would vary. Every business would be looked at and evaluated.
- The BID area was yet to be decided but once this had happened the businesses included would be looked at and consideration given to any possible exemptions. An outline business case would be established which would assist in setting levels of contribution.
- The process had been on hold awaiting the appointment of the co-ordinator. This had now happened and a meeting of the BID Academy was taking place in February 2010 after which more details could be circulated.

Given the importance of this matter to local businesses and the Council we asked the Council's Development Committee to ensure they are kept informed of progress.

In respect of the matters we asked the Partnership to consider at our April 2009 meeting we found that the position is as follows:

- Developing their relationship with the Chamber of Commerce – we learned they had taken our suggested action forward with the result that the Chamber of Commerce is now a member of the Partnership
- Ensuring the Heritage Trail features where appropriate in marketing and promotional material – we learned this has not yet happened because the proposed town centre street directory information guide aimed at the public to encourage fuller use of the town's facilities had

been delayed partly because of the recession and partly because it would form part of the BID process.

- 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 – we were told this had not happened and would form part of the BID process.
- Updating their website - – we were told this had not happened and again, would form part of the BID process.

Draft for approval

## 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.

We devoted our meeting in October 2009 to this issue and invited the Police, Victim Support and the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership to attend.

We learned there were 6 Safer Community Teams (SCT) in the Borough - Croyland, Hemmingwell, Wellingborough West, Wellingborough East, Wellingborough Rural North and Wellingborough Rural South. The purpose of an SCT is to provide the community with a policing service that was local, visible and accessible to local people. Each SCT was made up of Police Officers, Police Community Support Officers and Special Constables, as well as Officers from the Borough Council and Northamptonshire County Council.

The Police work as part of the local crime and disorder reduction partnership (CDRP). The CDRP is a statutory partnership, which includes representation from the Police, Northamptonshire NHS, Fire and Rescue Service, Borough and County Councils, Youth Offending Service Education and Victim Support. It was noted that Councillor Patel was the local authority lead for community safety and attended CDRP meetings.

Five delivery groups had been established by the CDRP to reflect the key areas of concern: Serious Acquisitive Crime, Signal Crime Group, Town Centre Task Force, Domestic Abuse Group and Vulnerable Children and Young People Group.

Our examination of the trend analysis for crime in Wellingborough revealed that the main issues are dwelling house burglary, anti-social Behaviour and violence. We learned that initiatives being taken to address these issues and others are meeting with a good degree of success have contributed towards reductions in violence, anti-social behaviour, criminal damage and crimes against school children.

In terms of 'all crime' the partnership has seen an overall reduction of 1.4% (148 less crimes compared to last year)

The CDRP achieved significant reductions in anti-social behaviour 17.3% (883 fewer reported incidents compared to last year.). It has also seen a 22.2% reduction in assault with injury. This means 106 less victims. There has been a 31.4% reduction in violence against the person in the town centre. This equates to 67 fewer crimes. A reduction of 33.3% in crimes committed against school children means 56 fewer crimes. Levels of residual violence (3pm – 4pm) are 14% below the baseline level. There has been a reduction of 12.2% in violence against the person (146 fewer crimes compared to last year and a significant reduction of 7.4% in criminal damage offences, which equates to 146 fewer crimes.

Despite the significant reductions, we learned there have also been increases in vehicle crime and domestic burglary of 9.3% which means that there has been 120 more recorded crimes this year 2008/09 in comparison to last year 2007/08. There was also an increase of 9.9% in arson incidents (14 more crimes compared to last year) and an increase of 4.2% in repeat domestic abuse crimes.

In light of this we raised a number of specific issues with the Police and CDRP and were told that these would be considered. The issues are:

- Concentration of resources on days and times where levels of Anti-Social Behaviour is particularly high
- The ability for Police to send text messages to mobile phones in the community;
- Racist graffiti around the Castle ward
- A hotline number be provided to Members and members of the public to report incidents of graffiti to enable these to be removed quickly
- More effective use of the Council's graffiti machine with routine graffiti cleansing be scheduled for Mondays rather than Fridays
- Fly tipping in rural areas
- SCT monthly emails to be reinstated to provide Ward Members with useful information
- Neighbourhood Renewal Committees members to be able to have a say in the decision making of the Community Panels and what the priorities should be within their wards
- Initiatives to reduce motorcycles causing a noise nuisance
- Initiatives to tackle distraction burglary
- Extension of Smart water across the Borough at a cheaper rate
- Limited take up of the offer of mini CCTV for taxis

We also questioned the effectiveness of the current structure of the CDRP and its reporting mechanisms.

It was agreed that improved partnership working between the Police and the Borough Council to address the issues of graffiti and litter would make Wellingborough a safer place to live.

In light of this we decided that

- Reports should be taken to the Council's Community Committee regarding the extent and pattern of use of the graffiti machine and the use of anti-graffiti substance on the war memorial, and the provision of an off-road site for motor cycles users
- Council Officers investigate more publicity of our successes to help deal with the perception of crime as permitted

- Better provision be made for the roll out of Smart water and also night buses on a regular basis;
- The Council's Leadership Team be asked to look at the governance of CDRP to see if it matches the requirements of the future.

In order to have a rounded picture of the issue we also received information from Victim Support.

We learned that Victim Support is an independent national charity for victims and witnesses of crime in England and Wales. They provide free confidential information, practical help and emotional support to victims and witnesses of crime by a trained team of volunteers. Persons do not have to report a crime to the police to get their help and can get support at any time, whenever the crime happened.

Victim Support also offer a Witness Service in every criminal court to help people called as witnesses, and also campaign for greater rights for victims and witnesses and to raise awareness.

Victim Support makes extensive use of volunteers. Volunteers outnumber staff in Victim Support and the Witness Service by about four to one. Most volunteers are involved in directly supporting victims and witnesses. Most tend to focus on either work with victims in the community or supporting witnesses at court, but some volunteers do both kinds of work. Other volunteers work on the Victim Supportline, taking calls from victims and other people affected by crime. Some volunteers specialise in specific activities, such as helping young witnesses at court. Volunteers also help with back office functions, or with fundraising.

We also learned that the two services provided by Victim Support; Community based Victim Support and Court based Witness Service, were completely separate and different trained volunteer case workers were assigned to each. They can also commission services to help prevent certain incidents.

Our inquiries revealed that locally, they work in partnership with

- Safer Communities Teams regarding home safety and reassurance, especially in the case of Anti-Social Behaviour
- Women's Aid, for refuge provision and outreach support
- Northamptonshire Rights and Equality Council in cases of racism, homophobia and discrimination against disabled people
- Borough Council of Wellingborough for homelessness issues
- Wellingborough Homes on behalf of tenants
- Nene Valley Citizens Advice Bureau
- Voluntary sector forum

The North Northamptonshire team consists of three full time employees and 26 volunteers and dealt with 2,200 referrals in 2008/09. Wellingborough Victim Support's achievements include a reliable team of volunteers, recent success with a criminal injuries compensation claim and a range of referrals.

We discussed how success rates for domestic violence abuse cases is measured and the gender breakdown of domestic violence abuse. We learned what advice is provided in domestic violence cases. We asked about controls in place for possible misuse of self-referrals and sought clarification on what was provided by the Witness Service.

We learned that Victim Support is seeking to establish reporting channels via Housing Associations and the Racial Equality Council.

We learned that a particular challenge locally for Victim Support is finding suitable venues for meetings with service clients and we undertook to look into finding possible venues for Victim Support for appointments, particularly out of office hours and in rural parts of the Borough.

Draft for approval

## **Improving life chances for young people**

At our June 2009 and January 2010 meetings we followed up on the work this Committee initiated last year in respect of helping our secondary schools improve the level of aspiration and attainment of their students.

Low achievement is a national issue and the fact that so many pupils fail to achieve their educational potential has a serious detrimental effect on their future life chances and on society generally.

Attainment of children and young people in Northamptonshire has improved markedly over the last 3 years and more young people are achieving better exam results and key stage attainments. However, performance is still below national and statistical neighbours' averages

This is why the Committee takes a particular interest in scrutinising this issue.

We heard that progress had been made since our review and that close ties had been developed between the Council, Wellingborough Education Partnership and the Prosper Delivery Group of the LSP.

The issue of 'Improving the Attainment of Underachieving Groups in Northamptonshire...' had also been the subject of a Northamptonshire County Council Scrutiny Review that had been reported to the county council's cabinet in November 2009.

The review had a number of recommendations with which the Council, through the Local Strategic Partnership, could assist with, in particular:

- Work with private businesses to encourage sponsorship, mentoring and apprenticeships, so that young people become quality employees for their businesses
- Initiatives to increase the number of business community mentors or volunteers to pilot a young person's version of 'The Apprentice'
- Recommend that schools consider the use of former students when putting support mechanism in place to improve the attainment of underachieving groups of children and particularly for extended offer activities.

We were informed that the next Wellingborough Education Partnership update would inform Members of progress on actions towards raising educational attainment and aspiration. The transition project driven by Weavers School had proved successful and both the Wrenn and Sir Christopher Hatton Schools had expressed an interest to participate in the project.

The Council is working closely with the county council, North Northamptonshire Development Company and the Tresham Institute to develop a diverse provision for education and employment within the Borough.

In light of this, we recommended to the Council that it continues to support and work with the Wellingborough Education Partnership to raise educational attainment and aspiration in the Borough and formally endorses the recommendations in county council's scrutiny report and offer its support where necessary to implement them.

At the January 2010 meeting we also heard from the county council on the work it does via the Children and Young People's Partnership to address issues affecting the quality of life of children and young people in the Borough. The Children and Young People's Partnership seeks to ensure that all children in Northamptonshire are healthy, safe and are able to enjoy and achieve so that they will make a positive contribution throughout their lives and achieve economic well being. Joe Hubbard, the Council's Interim Chief Executive, is the Council's representative on the Board of the Partnership.

We were advised that the county council's Children and Young People department had been re-structured to match the district and borough council areas to ensure closer partnership working.

The Children and Young People's Plan 2009-2012 guides the work of the partnership. The key priorities and areas of the Plan for Northamptonshire are influenced by the national Five Outcomes for children and young people. These are:

- Be Healthy
- Stay Safe
- Enjoy and Achieve
- Make a Positive Contribution
- Achieve Economic Well-Being

The priorities in the Northamptonshire Plan that put the above into practice are:

- Living a healthy lifestyle
- Making positive and informed choices
- Are happy, have high self esteem and positive aspirations
- Safety, security and respect in homes, schools and communities
- Achieving the best possible start in life
- Enjoying learning and achieving at school and beyond
- Living in decent homes, particularly the most vulnerable, and in sustainable communities
- Achieving high levels of transferable skills in education training and employment
- Play an active part in decision making at service, local and broader levels
- Engage in positive and law abiding behaviour in and out of school

We asked questions as to performance against the various targets for each of these priorities and learned that particular areas of concern in the Borough are attainment and skills, school attendance (the Borough has the worst record in the County), juvenile crime rate, teenage pregnancy rates and obesity.

In response to questions on the issue of late arrivals we were told that persistent late arrival is often related to children having to look after parents affected by substance misuse. This also impacts on the ability of these children to participate in sport and other recreational and social activities.

We asked what measures schools are taking to address poor attendance and were told that an action plan had been established to improve attendance at schools. This involves looking at the relevance of the curriculum, making better use of powers to tackle poor attendance and targeting support on persistent absentees.

We also asked what measures are being taken to address young carers' needs. We were told that the county council's young carers' team is working closely with the health service to address their needs. It was noted that the School of Life project was a good model for the county and there had been real successes in the Borough. The aim of the project is to promote and encourage better understanding between the generations by providing opportunities for people aged 25 and under and people aged 50 and over, to learn skills from one another or to work together on common projects.

In response to our suggestion that better use should be made of school facilities out of hours we were told that this is already a priority and that thus far the extended school initiative was on target. Evening access remains an issue and the county council is working with head teachers and governors to overcome their reservations.

We also expressed our concern at poor service in the area from youth workers. We were told that the county council commissions all youth work from the voluntary sector and this has had the affect of increasing provision generally. The county council undertook to look into the position in the Borough.

Another concern we had was in relation to an increase in bullying and we asked how this could be monitored. We were told that there are procedures in place but work needs to be done to monitor better incidents of 'cyber bullying' and bullying by text messages.

We expressed the opinion that the initiatives under the living a healthy lifestyle priority should also include reducing alcohol abuse as well as reducing substance misuse. We were told that the refresh of the Plan would include alcohol and substance misuse as separate issues as well as smoking.

In view of the issues surrounding the life chances of young people in the Borough we decided to carry out a review similar to that in respect of educational attainment in the Borough.

## **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. We had a particular focus on the work of the County Council because of changes they were making to services that directly affected the people of the Borough.

At our January 2010 meeting we discussed the issue of health in the Borough and sought to obtain a better understanding of the work of NHS Northamptonshire generally and of the county council in relation to adult social care.

NHS Northamptonshire is the healthcare provider for the population of the county and is responsible for the local budget from the National Health Service.

As a result of our inquiries, we learned that the three main components of the refreshed 5-year NHS Northamptonshire Strategy are

- To reduce overall mortality
- Help people to live healthier lives, reduce inequalities and improve their well-being
- To deliver the financial savings and efficiency improvements to enable the local health system to thrive within the resources available.

It was noted that partnership working was a key factor to addressing those priorities, particularly in areas of childhood obesity, teenage pregnancy and alcohol harm and we welcomed the improved way in which NHS Northamptonshire engages with the LSP and works particularly closely with the Council's environmental health team in the area of public health education and promotion. Key areas of work here are:

- Weight management initiatives
- Encouraging healthier food choices
- Increasing awareness and education of the adverse health effects of smoking
- Health promotion through community based events and visits to schools

Teenage pregnancy rates are an issue locally so we inquired into the reasons why this might be and were told that the evidence from Corby suggests that high levels of poverty of aspiration might be directly linked to the rate of teenage pregnancies. Where, as in Corby, young females' educational attainment has been improved the rate of teenage pregnancy has fallen. There are also strong links to norm behaviours for particular areas and socio-economic background.

Teenage birth is bad because it has a high risk of both infant death and ill-health for the mother and tends to create a spiral of similar activity.

To respond to this issue we recommended that a report be taken to the Council's Community Committee proposing that Task Force Groups of

partners be established, particularly in the deprived wards, to address issues of teenage pregnancy.

Another issue of concern locally is obesity and in response to our questions we were told that councils have a key role to play in prevention through provision of a range of fitness and exercise facilities and locations.

We asked why dealing with the consequences of drug use did not appear as a priority area in the strategy. We were told that this was not a priority compared with other areas but this did not mean it was being overlooked.

We also asked whether the mental health priority included dementia. We were told that it was and that the proposed activities recognised the needs of carers of dementia sufferers.

With regard to adult social care we learned that the county council's medium term strategy is to develop more personalised services and to implement the vision set out nationally in "Putting People First". As part of its project to transform adult social care in the County, NCC is undertaking a number of initiatives. These include:

- Early intervention and prevention
- Personal budgets
- Safeguarding
- Re-ablement
- Carrying out a strategic review of direct services
- Re- providing support and accommodation for people with learning disabilities currently living as patients of the NHS.

Key objectives of the strategy include:

- Reducing the number of permanent admissions to residential and nursing care
- Achieving the independence of older people through rehabilitation / intermediate care
- Increasing the number of people in receipt of Self Directed Support
- Increasing the number of carers assessed or reviewed and provided with support, information and advice
- Rebuilding the relationship and reputation of Northamptonshire County Council with the voluntary/community sector and carers
- Increasing the proportion of adults with learning disabilities in employment
- Increasing the proportion of adults with learning disabilities in settled accommodation
- Increasing the number of people supported to live independently

- Increasing the percentage of permanent placements in homes rated as 2 stars and above; and
- Increasing the number of customers reporting dignity and respect in their treatment.

We were informed that demographic factors were driving the changed approach. Over the last 60 years the overall population for England and Wales had increased by 20%, infant mortality rates had decreased significantly and average life expectancy had increased significantly. Although expenditure in the area of adult social care had increased the current system was not sustainable because of the ongoing adverse change in the ratio of working to retired people.

We learned that in Wellingborough, the county council directly support or commission services for 1016 people. This includes services such as meals on wheels, day care (including services from the Council's Glamis Hall Day Centre), home care and residential care. Indirect support was provided to an additional 3,000 people or thereby through funding to other organisations.

We noted the 240% increase in the number of persons living beyond 80 years of age over the last fifty years or so and sought information on the proposals for meeting the care needs of this section of the community. We heard that Northamptonshire has the highest proportion of elderly people in care homes in all of England and Wales. To improve quality of life for people living in care homes the county council is increasing its expectations of care home providers, for example it requires all rooms to have en-suite facilities, and is applying these standards to its own facilities.

We asked what is being done to enable people to stay longer in their own homes and was told that there was a need for the adaptation of housing so that it could better meet the needs of older people. There is also a need to increase all forms of specialist housing for older people where care services are provided or facilitated. This includes extra care housing, assisted living, very sheltered housing, close care and continuing care environments, and care villages. In Northamptonshire, there is a shortage of nursing as opposed to care homes and development of extra care housing in particular is needed to plug the gap between sheltered housing and residential care homes/nursing homes.

In March 2010 we looked into the work of the County Council in its role as highways authority.

We learned that in order to improve service delivery the highways department had restructured into four units with clearer lines of responsibility. The main responsibilities of the department are:

- Road and footpath maintenance
- Highway improvements, including new roads
- Winter maintenance
- Street lighting
- Transport planning

- Development control
- Passenger transport, including community transport

The Council and the highways department work together in a variety of areas such as development control, highways trees and verge maintenance, co-ordinating winter maintenance plans and regeneration schemes.

The main area of our attention was the County Council's response to the snow in the early part of 2010. In response to questions we learned that winter maintenance is demand driven in line with an agreed policy rather than budget driven and that Northamptonshire has one of the highest gritting treatment rates of any authority in England. Salt and grit supply had not been a problem this year.

We asked how long it would be before the damage caused to roads by the winter weather would be repaired. We were told that a new Highways Maintenance Strategy was being proposed and this would be discussed by the county council's cabinet on 13 April 2010. If this was approved a formal announcement would be made as to how the backlog of maintenance would be addressed. We asked for an update to be provided to us following the cabinet meeting and the county council undertook to do this.

On a related theme we inquired into the level of inspection for the maintenance of footpaths and whether it is carried out on a needs basis. We were told that the contractor follows the national maintenance guidance for roads and footpaths, which range from monthly for higher classified roads to six-monthly for others which carry less traffic and pedestrians. A range of exploratory measures are taken to identify the cause and make the repairs, which are prioritised on a needs basis. The proposed new Highways Maintenance Strategy places a greater emphasis on preventative measures rather than reactive.

In relation to the management of highway works in the Borough we asked why we were included in an area with South Northamptonshire when we were aligned for other purposes with the other districts and boroughs in North Northamptonshire. The county council said the reason for this was unclear and at our request undertook to look into changing the arrangement.

We also asked that consideration be given to improving the Street Doctor reporting service so that it provides feedback on progress in dealing with reported incidents. The county council undertook to do this.

A major source of concern is unrepaired potholes and we sought more information on this matter. There was a prioritisation and intervention criteria that was laid down nationally to deal with potholes, namely 50mm for a pothole on a road and 25mm for a hazard on a footpath and this was adhered to by the county council.

We also learned that potholes are painted to distinguish between county council and utility undertakings responsibility. Utility companies have 3 months to carry out the repair and then have responsibility for a period of 12 months thereafter. While the county council could restrict and control when some of the new works were carried out, they did not have any powers to stop service connections or repair works. In response to our concerns over the

quality of utility repairs were told that the national standard states that highway authorities carry out random inspections on 6% of any excavation works done by the utility companies. They do not get paid for carrying out a greater number of inspections so do no more than the required minimum.

We then turned our attention to footpath gritting and sought information about replenishment of grit bins. It was acknowledged that during the severe weather conditions it had proved difficult to replenish all grit bins within the usual timescale. We suggested that the community could take responsibility and accountability for the grit bins and we welcomed the discussions the county council were holding with the Boroughs and Districts to put in place improved arrangements for dealing with severe weather conditions.

On the issue of parking control we asked what measures are being taken to prevent unauthorised parking on grass verges and deal with the resulting damage. We were told that the police could carry out enforcement if they considered that the vehicle was causing an obstruction. If enforcement was to be carried out by the Civil Enforcement Officers, then a traffic order would need to be implemented. In addition a local by-law could also be explored. It was agreed there needed to be better partnership working with the police, boroughs and districts to establish what the solutions were to this issue. We therefore asked the Council's Development Committee to review the principle of bye-laws in terms of parking and to determine whether or not it was feasible to enhance the present arrangement.

In relation to traffic orders we recalled the assurances given when the Countywide Parking Partnership was formed that traffic orders for the whole of the County would be checked and updated where necessary. We therefore inquired into the current position. We were informed that there was a backlog but that additional employees had been deployed to deal with it and a review of each geographical area within the County was being carried out. It was envisaged this would be completed by March 2011.

We asked about the new street lighting project and sought assurance that the new street lamps would be environmentally friendly. We were told that energy efficient light bulbs along with modern dimming technology would be installed, which would reduce energy consumption and thus carbon emissions. We also sought and were given assurance that footpath repairs would be co-ordinated with street lighting installation so as to avoid wasted expenditure.

We expressed concern at the regular lack of representation from the highways department on site viewings of planning applications. We were told that this was due to resource issues. If the locality was known to the allocated officer, a written response would be made but for larger scale development a site visit would be made.

Related to this issue was our concern over poor consultation on two major projects in the town of Wellingborough – Broadway/London Road and the Sheep Street improvement works. We suggested that lists of works in wards should be given to ward councillors at regular intervals. The county council agreed there needed to be better communication with Borough, District and Parish Councils. A monthly bulletin had been introduced for county councillors to provide an update on highways issues and provide answers to frequently

asked questions. Consideration was being given as to whether it could have a wider circulation to include borough and district members including parishes and town Councils.

We also looked into the position regarding community transport. We were told that a full review of the Integrated Transport Management Unit, which has oversight of most forms of bus transport including community transport, had been carried out and the findings of the review together with recommendations would be submitted to Cabinet in June 2010.

On the issue of encouraging more cycling we asked if the cycle proficiency project was available for every child in the county. We were told that the highways department was working very closely with the schools with the use of cycle proficiency advisers.

At our meeting in May 2010, we asked NHS Northamptonshire and the Gold Street GP practices to inform us on progress with the project to construct a new surgery facility on the Isebrook Hospital and to discuss local medical provision generally. We were concerned to ensure that the new facility would not duplicate or detract from existing provision at Isebrook or elsewhere in the Borough.

We were told that the new primary care facility at Isebrook was aimed at enhancing local primary care provision and would therefore complement rather than compete with Isebrook Hospital, which focused on secondary care. The new facility enabled a more co-ordinated approach to care. For example, there would be a social services presence within the building as part of the national integrated care pilot, an increase in use by consultants for outpatient clinics and opportunities for more minor surgical procedures to be performed locally. The provision of a Dental practice at some point in the future would be a further additional service provision for patients.

One of the practices relocating to Isebrook also has a surgery at Earls Barton and we sought assurance that this surgery would not be affected adversely by the new arrangements. We were told that it would not and that provision at Earls Barton was being increased by offering more afternoon sessions

As a result of further questions on this issue we learned that a pharmaceutical licence is not being pursued and it is not proposed to have dispensing GPs at Isebrook. However, the new building could accommodate an independent pharmacy should one wish to locate there. Similarly, there is no proposal to have an optician service at the facility. They would also welcome an osteopath service should one wish to locate there.

The new facility is scheduled for completion in October 2011.

We expressed concern that as things currently stand Isebrook is not easily accessible via public transport and asked if consideration could be given to retaining a presence at Gold Street. We were told that the relocation plan was based on research which showed that the vast majority of patients travelled by car to Gold Street and the location of the new facility would not increase journey time significantly. The new facility would have much improved arrangements for car parking compared to Gold Street. In addition, the planned expansion of the town to the east would make Isebrook a more central location. They recognised there was a need to improve the bus service

to Isebrook. To assist with this we asked Officers to seek to facilitate improvement to the current bus route service to Isebrook.

With parking charges common at other NHS hospital facilities we sought assurance that car parking at the new facility at Isebrook would remain free of charge and were told that it would.

In the light of the expansion of service at the Isebrook Hospital site we sought assurance over the impact on the expansion plans of the new facility being built at Irthlingborough and how much interaction or what benefit would there be, especially as the Council wished to see a Minor Injury Unit established at Isebrook.

This was not something that could be answered at our meeting as it was not part of the remit of those who attended our meeting, but the NHS representative undertook to seek advice and report back to Officers. We were told that from a strategic point of view, the changes at Isebrook could be seen as the start locally of implementation of the 'Care Closer to Home' plan. The Minor Injuries Unit falls into the empowerment of the GP service under that plan, which would be asked to enhance that service. It is envisaged that 24/7 coverage of minor injuries would be through primary care rather than building a separate minor injuries unit. Isebrook is currently available for patients to see a doctor out of hours as part of the Nenedoc arrangements.

Following up this issue further we asked if a recovery/rehabilitation service is being ruled out altogether and were told that provision of such a service was being reviewed, with a view to extending the provision.

We also asked if there were plans to expand the Nenedoc facility at Isebrook. We were told that if demand increased, then NHS Northamptonshire would review the provision with the providers of that service.

We were also concerned that the existence of the Nenedoc service at the Isebrook Hospital site was not widely known and NHS Northamptonshire undertook to arrange for the service at Isebrook to be more widely publicised. We suggested that their communications team should seek publicity through The Link and the Council's website, and Northamptonshire County Council's Together paper and website.

We also asked about plans to improve the care of elderly people; especially what arrangements are proposed to improve the care of persons transferring from hospitals to nursing homes. We were told that Patients have a choice of transferring their care from their own doctor to the doctor's practice that looks after a particular nursing home and each home has a designated practice to improve continuity of care.

We expressed concern that the number of people going into residential care is still high despite it being the desire of most people want to stay in their own homes. We were told that to keep safely people at home who are elderly and frail depends on the primary care service and social services being able to look after them at home properly. This issue is being addressed as part of the National integrated Care pilot and The End of Life Care strategy for Northamptonshire had been completely revised and was ready to be signed off by the Board.

In the light of the changes going on locally and nationally in respect of the nature of health care provision we suggested that the Council and the Local Strategic Partnership (Wellingborough Partnership Healthier Delivery Group) should help facilitate public consultation, especially as there is great interest in development at the Isebrook Hospital site.

We were told that NHS Northamptonshire has launched a period of consultation on primary care throughout the county to re-engage the public and to analyse the level of healthcare needs and profile what could be delivered in the future. The main vehicle for consultation would be patient participation groups organised by the various GP practices in the county. They would however welcome greater engagement with the LSP. We therefore asked the LSP to ensure that all strands of NHS Northamptonshire are invited and represented on its Healthier Delivery Group.

We also asked if the Link organisation had been approached for consultation and learned that a member of that organisation had been elected onto the NHS Northamptonshire Executive Board and would be involved in the consultation work.

Under this priority heading we also include the work we do to scrutinise the Northamptonshire Partnership (and 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 November 2009.

The Northamptonshire Partnership is the overarching partnership for the county comprising agencies across the public sector all working together to deliver better outcomes for residents using their services in Northamptonshire.

The Partnership has a key relationship with the

- Sustainable Communities Strategy for Northamptonshire
- Local Area Agreement for Northamptonshire (LAA)
- Comprehensive Area Assessment 2009
- Northamptonshire Improvement & Efficiency Program 2008/11

Strategic leadership and direction was through the Northamptonshire Public Service Board (PSB), with representatives from all the bodies involved in the Local Area Agreement and its delivery. The PSB is supported by the Chief Executives Group and the Partnership Support Unit (PSU). The PSU, funded by partner contributions and hosted by the Northamptonshire County Council (NCC), was established to help develop and improve structural arrangements, promote the partnership locally, regionally and nationally and lead on key developments.

Five 'Delivery' Boards operate across the whole LAA, each taking responsibility for coordinating and commissioning activity designed to meet the targets set within the agreement and aligned to the ambitions in the Sustainable Communities Strategy. These delivery boards are:

- Health and Well-being Board

- Communities Board
- Regeneration and Growth Board
- Economic Development Board
- Children and Young People's Partnership Board.

A Partnership Performance Board (PPB), comprising the Chairs of the Delivery Boards and Chief Executives of NCC, NHS Northamptonshire and Northampton Borough Council, was established in April 2009 to ensure achievement of the LAA targets.

In response to questions were told that

- Establishment of a countywide Scrutiny Board would need to show that it provided added value and benefit.
- The Communities Board had a statutory responsibility for community safety on behalf of the County, which was responsible for commissioning activity via Area Based Grants to community safety areas. The Children and Young People's Partnership Board was also a statutory requirement.
- The Healthier Communities Older People Board had been removed from the Partnership structure and replaced with the Health and Well-being Board.
- It was envisaged that voluntary sector representatives would be appointed to each Partnership Board.

In our opinion, detailed explanation of the LAA performance report for quarter two 2009/10 to the Partnership Performance Board would be beneficial to provide a better understanding of the data.

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 aims for Northamptonshire set out in the agreement are:

- To be successful through sustainable growth and regeneration, by making sure that:
  - Residents live in housing that is sustainable, affordable and of good quality
  - We have public services to deal with new growth
  - We can improve and preserve buildings and the countryside for future generations

- To develop through having a growing economy with more skilled jobs where:
  - We encourage and support employers to create the right number, quality and distribution of jobs
  - Workers have the right skills to respond to the employment needs of a dynamic economy
  - Residents have the opportunity to learn throughout their lives
- To have safe and strong communities where:
  - Residents have a shared identity and are involved in developing their communities
  - Levels of crime and disorder are lower in all our neighbourhoods
  - Public services meet the needs of residents
- To have healthy people who enjoy a good quality of life. To do this we will:
  - Support vulnerable people to help them lead fulfilling lives
  - Help young people to have the best possible preparation to become adults
  - Help residents to make choices that improve their health and wellbeing

We learned that the LAA was completing its second annual review/refresh. The review process would consider how best to disaggregate the targets and performance information with the aim of setting more local targets where feasible and desirable, as most targets at present relate to Northamptonshire as a whole. This is something we welcomed.

Work continues on target development for a number of the indicators, the performance management framework and the important delivery plans. Embedding the LAA in the service and financial planning of individual partner organisations remains a current challenge.

We also asked the Council's representative on the LAA PSB to tell us what progress the LAA had made towards achieving its priorities and we learned that of the LAA's 64 targets:

- 15 were at least 10% above target
- 22 were on target
- 9 were just below target
- 10 were at least 10% below target
- 10 had no data available

This is an improvement on the position last year.

We made a number of comments regarding the LAA performance report and was suggested that the following red indicator targets be investigated to see if the Council could assist in improving performance

- Improved street and environmental cleanliness.
- Educational targets although it was noted that performance had markedly improved this year and more young people were achieving better exam results and key stage attainments.
- Looked after children targets. It was noted that development of an internship programme for young people and looked after children in the county would provide better engagement and support.
- A comparison with other districts on the disaggregated LAA targets would be valuable information, e.g. number of affordable homes delivered.

We were told that a report on the LAA was being reported to the Community Committee, which would provide detailed breakdown of the targets and the Council's contributions towards the targets. It was noted that a report would also be presented to the next Wellingborough Partnership Steering Group meeting.

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 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. The Strategy was reviewed in October 2009.

Governance of the Partnership is the role of the Partnership Steering Group, chaired by Councillor Paul Bell, and as part of the Sustainable Community Strategy review, we learned that the LSP reviewed its own structure and terms of reference in order to improve its effectiveness. There was also a review of membership of the sub-groups to reflect these changes.

Each of the Terms of Reference of the delivery groups have been standardized. Membership of groups is only open to those attendees who can deliver on specific targets. Other people who may attend the meetings are those members of the Steering Group in an observing capacity, or members of the public who wish to speak on a specific issue. The rules regarding public attendance apply in the same way as those regarding attendance at Council meetings.

The Council is the lead partner on the Wellingborough Partnership, the Local Strategic Partnership for the Borough, and chaired the Steering Group and three of its Delivery Groups. In order to provide strong leadership, the aspiration was that the other three Delivery Groups would also be chaired by Members. It was noted that the CDRP was a statutory partnership with statutory guidance on how it was constituted and managed.

The Steering Group, which meets quarterly, is charged with the task of taking the lead in developing the Partnership and monitoring the work of Partnership's six themed Delivery 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)

We then turned our attention to the performance of the LSP in the year and learned that of the LSP's 34 targets

- There were 14 where the LSP was making the progress it intended on or ahead of target
- There were 12 where although progress had been made with some aspects as intended, others aspects were lagging behind
- There were 8 where the LSP had not made the progress it intended

7 of the 8 missed target were in one area – Healthier – so we focused our attention here first. We were told that The Healthier Delivery Group (HDG) had not functioned for 9 months and had been re-launched by the Borough Council in September 2009. A revised action plan had been prepared in readiness for the next meeting of the HDG and the Steering Group was confident that progress would now be made.

We also learned that

- A review of the Prosper and Children and Young People's Delivery Groups' targets was being undertaken in relation to the outcome of improving life chances for young people, to avoid duplication.
- A sub group of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership was looking at specific action plans to deal with serious acquisitive crime and anti-social behaviour
- The renovation of the Skills HOPE centre had been completed and plans were in place to ensure it was sustainable and supported.

We heard that the 'Recession to Recovery' conference in March 2009 had been successful and led to a number of schemes and initiatives 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.

In February 2010 we discussed the issue of waste management; in particular the issue of waste disposal and to assist us we asked the Northamptonshire Waste Partnership and the County Council to attend.

The role of the Northamptonshire Waste Partnership (NWP) is to ensure joint working and collaboration on waste issues between the Waste Collection Authorities and the County Council as the Waste Disposal Authority so as to deliver the objectives of the Northamptonshire Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy.

One of the major initiatives under the strategy is Project Reduce, a joint initiative between Milton Keynes Council and Northamptonshire County Council, aimed at procuring a contractor to handle residual waste – waste that cannot be reused or recycled – over a 25-30 year period. We were assured that it is not intended to curtail recycling but instead looks to provide a long term solution and alternative to landfill.

We asked what progress was being made with the tender process for the project and learned that twelve companies and consortia initially came forward in response to the tender notice published in April 2009 and 10 were selected to proceed. The project is being procured through a process known as competitive dialogue and throughout 2009 dialogue had taken place with bidders with the result that by January 2010 4 bidders remained. These will be asked to submit final tenders to show exactly how they intend to design, build and operate the required waste treatment and disposal facilities. The winning bid is expected to be announced in mid-2011, with new facilities in place by 2014. We asked if it had become clear yet what type of treatment processes would be used and where facilities might be sited but were told that it was too early in the tendering process to predict.

Our other area of concern was the changes made by the County Council to the operation of its household waste recycling centres; in particular the changes to the site at Wollaston, where only recyclable waste will now be collected, and the reduction in the number of days the site in Wellingborough would be open.

Why asked why the Wollaston Household Waste Recycling Centre was being limited to recyclable material only. We were told this is because it is a small site which presented difficulties because of the size of waste containers required.

We were very concerned about the possibility of an increase in fly tipping as a result of the changes being made and asked what was being done to combat this. We were told that it was hoped that the risk of increased fly tipping could be reduced by a phased introduction of the revised operations together with

information on when sites would be closed. If fly tipping occurred when a site was closed this would have to be looked at and ways of mitigating the problem considered. Enterprise Managed Services, the new contractor had experience from working with Staffordshire County Council on handling similar situations so the County Council was confident the situation could be managed satisfactorily. The County Council undertook to ensure our concerns were raised with the appropriate enforcement teams.

We said that more publicity should be given to the changes to operating hours at the sites, the range of materials accepted at each site, and the restrictions imposed on householders as part of the drive to combat abuse of the sites by persons seeking to pass off commercial waste as household waste. The County Council agreed to do this.

In relation to restrictions on householders they told us that as part of the arrangements to combat abuse they imposed a vehicle limit of 3.5 tonnes. Where inert DIY building waste was delivered to the sites by householders then a certain number of free visits over a 2 month period was permitted, it is only where that limit was exceeded that a charge would be made.

Such was our concern over this issue that we told the County Council we would be asking them to return to a meeting later in 2010 to report on how the new service was performing and the success or otherwise of their efforts to prevent an increase in fly tipping.