

**-NORTHAMPTONBOROUGH COUNCIL  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1**

**PARTNERSHIPS, REGENERATION, COMMUNITY SAFETY AND ENGAGEMENT**

Monday 25 January 2010

**PRESENT:** Councillor John Yates Chair; Councillors John Caswell, Jenny Conroy, Brendan Glynane, David Palethorpe, Andrew Simpson and Keith Davies (substituting for Councillor Ifty Choudary)

David Kennedy	- Chief Executive – Item No 5
Sue Bridge	- Head of Planning - Items No 6 and 7
Emma Arklay	- Planning Policy Officer – Items Nos. 6 and 7
Steve Elsey	- Head of Public Protection – Item No 8
Debbie MacColl	- Community Safety Administration Officer – Item No 9
Gavin Chambers	- Head of Finance and Assets – Item No 10
Chris Cavanagh	- Head of Regeneration
Thomas Hall	- Head of Policy – Item No: 12(a)
Francis Fernandes	- Borough Solicitor
Tracy Tiff	- Scrutiny Officer

**Observing**

Councillor Paul Varnsverry	Portfolio Holder (Community Engagement)
Councillor Pam Varnsverry	
Councillor Tony Clarke	- agenda items 6 and 13(a)
Councillor Tess Scott	
Phil Morrison	- Finance Manager
Gary Youens	- Political Assistant
Richard Powell	- Neighbourhood Coordinator

**Members of the public**

Al Bell – Community Matters  
Elizabeth Percival – Parklands Community Center  
Toby Birch – Alliston Gardens Community Centre  
Keith Westhead – Kingsheath Residents' Association  
Joyce Smith – Abington Community Centre  
Sandra Bell – Doddridge Centre  
Eric Atkins – Duston Community Association  
Stephen Richards – Alliston Gardens Community Centre

12 further individuals - observing

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ifty Choudary (Vice Chair) and Councillor Judith Lill.

## **2. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2009 were signed by the Chair as a true record.

## **3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLICADDRESSES**

Al Bell, Community Matters, Elizabeth Percival, Parklands Community Centre, Toby Birch, Alliston Gardens Community Centre, Keith West head, Kingsheath Residents Association, Joyce Smith, Abington Community Centre, Eric Atkins, Duston Community Association, Sandra Bell, Doddridge Centre and Stephen Richards, Alliston Gardens Community Centre addressed the Committee on agenda item 13(a) – Community Centre Task and Finish Group.

Councillor Tony Clarke addressed the Committee on agenda items 6 – Planning Consent PFI schools and 13(a) – Community Centres Task and Finish Group.

## **4. DECLARATIONSOFINTEREST(INCLUDINGWHIPPING)**

Councillor Brendan Glynane declared a prejudicial interest as a member of the Southern Community Group in agenda item 13(a) – Community Centres Task and Finish Group.

## **5. CONSULTATION DETAILS – FIVE-YEAR REVIEW – WEST NORTHANTS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (WNDC)**

David Kennedy, Chief Executive, referred the Committee to a paper issued from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) that gave details of the outcome of the Quinquennial review of the three Urban Development Corporations (UDC). David Kennedy commented that this brings an end of the Quinquennial review of the West Northants Development Corporation (WNDC). The outcome of the Review has a number of positive outcomes, which include: WNDC becoming more accountable and WNDC returning planning responsibilities to the local Planning Authorities. WNDC is currently responsible for applications of 50 or more homes as well as most applications in the centre of Northampton. It is intended that from April 2011 it will concentrate on planning applications for schemes of 200 homes or more and major commercial schemes across the area.

David Kennedy went on to comment that other Local Authorities and Public Agencies had responded to the consultation on the quinquennial review. The response of Northampton Borough Council was similar to that of Daventry District Council and South Northants but differed from the response of NCC, therefore a joint submission was not made.

WNDC will now concentrate on strategic delivery of key projects with more joint working with partners, who will release efficiencies, find new ways of working and savings across organisations. The paper issued by the DCLG advises that it would like to see a new type of local partnership take forward and deliver the work that WNDC has started. WNDC's natural life comes to an end in 2014. This is the date that the Government is expecting everyone to work to. It does not appear that this date will be extended. In the interim there is scope for WNDC to become a more strategic delivery focused organization working closely with other Agencies and partners. The Minister's statement says that the first stage of the transfer is that WNDC will only deal with larger applications and to return all other applications to the boroughs and districts, which includes all the applications with central area planning. It is expected that this will take effect from April 2011. Discussions have started with WNDC, which have indicated that there is an appetite for it to move more quickly than that. If the

new joint working arrangements can happen more quickly it will enable the Government to review this more quickly than 2014.

The Committee asked questions, made comment and heard: -

- The number of Local Authority representatives on the board will be preserved and the link with non Local Authority representatives will be strengthened.
- A clear definition of how Local Authority members and other nominees to the board will be replaced was requested, David Kennedy confirmed that a full explanation will be given to full Council in March 2010.
- It is expected that substantial cost reductions will be made of around £20 million by 2013/14 – if arrangements can be sorted at local level, further savings could be made. Whatever is undertaken at local level needs to be more cost effective.
- The Committee commented that the body that replaces WNDC must have a clear and proper focus, locally defined, based on Northampton.
- The Committee requested that further reports be presented to future meetings.
- In response to a query, David Kennedy confirmed that if a proper and good arrangement at local level were agreed quickly, things would happen more rapidly.
- David Kennedy confirmed that he would be expecting an exemplar model of efficient planning delivery, for example, an exemplar Local Authority in terms of planning in the future.
- The Council is making comment to the Government regarding the costs involved. There is a financial pressure.
- It was confirmed that NBC would only be responsible for planning applications within the Northampton boundary.
- The changes will have no effect on the Joint Planning Unit (JPU) – none of this review will change how it operates.
- In response to a query regarding timescales, David Kennedy advised that the timescale requires further discussion, as does the methodology, to ensure that it will work at local level, parts of which will require specialist knowledge. The first and most important message is the new process needs to work best for Northampton. This will be a key part of further discussions. For any new locally defined local delivery vehicle to work requires the support of all partners.

**AGREED:** (1) That the update be noted.

(2) That a further report be presented to a future meeting of this Committee.

## **6. PLANNING CONSENT – PRIVATE FINANCE INITIATIVE (PFI) SCHOOLS**

Sue Bridge, Head of Planning, and Emma Arklay, Planning Policy Officer, reminded the Committee that this issue had been discussed at the October 2009 meeting of this Committee and it had become apparent that there were still issues that the Committee required details on.

Sue Bridge referred to her briefing note explaining that the County Council submitted applications in 2004/05 as part of the school review to change education in Northampton from a three tier to a two-tier system. 35 applications were considered and approved. Of these, eight schools contained specific provision for community use agreements including sports development plans to be submitted and approved by the County Council. The other schools in the PFI project do not have this condition attached.

Sue Bridge added that as far as the remaining PFI schools are concerned, community access arrangements are as set out in the report to this Committee on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2009 and the letter from Northampton Schools Ltd dated 18<sup>th</sup> May.

Northamptonshire County Council has previously advised that it has contractual arrangements with the PFI provider that the same arrangements apply to all 42 schools, which does give NBC a problem in reviewing its Playing Pitch Strategy as the contractual arrangements relating to community access to the facilities are unknown. Therefore, the issues as set out in the report of 12<sup>th</sup> October 2009 remain unresolved as a true picture of sports and playing pitches available for community use cannot be quantified.

The Council's objections to the release of Kingsthorpe and Parklands schools will therefore be maintained until the whole question of access to the PFI playing pitches has been resolved. The County Council's agents have been advised of the position of both this Council and Sport England.

The Council's Planning Committee re-considered Bective School at its meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2010. WNDC has been advised that the proposals for this site should make provision for on-site community facilities.

The Committee asked questions, made comment and heard: -

- schoolbookers.com would not appear to have gone live. It was last checked the week before the Committee meeting.
- In response to a query whether NBC knows whether planning conditions are being adhered to, Sue Bridge advised that this is a matter for NCC's Planning Department and Planning Committee. If the conditions were not being adhered to, it would have an impact upon NBC's Playing Pitch Strategy. It was noted that it would be easier to monitor if the school bookers site was working.
- The Committee expressed its disappointment, adding that NCC should have put into place access agreements some years ago. It has created a lot of work for NBC and is unfair for those not given the access.
- Sue Bridge confirmed that NBC and Sports England are still maintaining their objections. This issue is going to have to be fully resolved before NBC can review its Playing Pitch Strategy.

Councillor Tony Clarke addressed the Committee, commenting that he appreciated the work that NBC's Planning Department had done but he felt that this Committee needed to be determined in taking this matter forward. NBC is a member of the Northampton Town Learning Partnership, the Partnership was to draw up the Access Management Agreement – this had not been done. All of the planning conditions were very clear in that affordability and deprivation was key. NCC has a blanket approach through schoolbookers.com - to apply for facilities at one price, for example an all weather pitch with changing rooms costs £76 to hire. Councillor Clarke felt that this did not take into consideration affordability or deprivation. He gave further examples of others being asked to pay commercial rates, adding that the Council has a duty to ensure that NCC looks at why it has not introduced separate Community Access Agreements for each of its schools. The Committee is better informed now. He referred to NCC taking all of the playing fields out and then putting back in when PFI created more facilities. Councillor Clarke concluded his address by commented that there is still a lot of work for NBC to do on this.

It was suggested that this issue could be referred to the Northamptonshire Countywide Scrutiny Forum for resolving, for example to ensure that agreements have been actioned, without the school bookers system, it cannot be checked. The Chair undertook to ascertain whether this issue was within the criteria for Reviews carried out by the Northants Countywide Scrutiny Forum.

The Committee suggested that there is a need for this issue to be addressed with NCC, but the full support of all Parties is required. The status of Northampton Learning Partnership needs to be clarified.

- AGREED:** (1) That the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 asks the Chief Executive, the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement meets with the relevant parties at NCC regarding this issue and report back to a future meeting of this Committee.
- (2) That the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 ascertains whether this issue was within the criteria for Reviews carried out by the Northants Countywide Scrutiny Forum.

## **7 THE CENTRAL AREA ACTION PLAN: SUBMISSION OF DRAFT PUBLICATION CONSULTATION**

Sue Bridge, Head of Planning, advised that consultation had taken place in the summer 2009, which had been very well received. All of the consultation responses had not yet been processed, but it was nearly finished. On balance the quality of response was high with interesting representations. A report will go forward to Cabinet in due course. It was confirmed that responses to consultations individually do not have to be issued but a precis of how consultations were received is produced.

Due to the gaps in the evidence base the next stage of consultation is around 9-10 months behind schedule. Therefore it will not be possible to meet the timetable as set out in the Local Development Scheme. The Joint Strategic Planning Committee has submitted a revised LDS timetable to GoEM and discussion with Government Office are taking place regarding the revised timetable.

The Committee made comment and asked questions: -

- It response to a query regarding slippage regarding the timetable, Sue Bridge confirmed that it is not possible to catch up due to the amount of work that has to be done on strengthening the evidence base. This timetable has been agreed and all the transport modeling work can be done within the revised timescale.
- The Government has changed the criteria that it assesses its Transport Policy. There has been a flurry of transportation studies, which has led to a study called DaSTS, which looks at the wider picture, which will take into account the work that is being done by NCC that has drawn together all the workstreams. Regular meetings are taking place and the revised timetable is on target.
- The Committee commented that water cycle studying is complex which includes an intermediate phase too. It was confirmed that the water study is not as troubling in terms of timescale.

**AGREED:** The Committee supported the consultation process.

## **8 NBC'S ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICE CONSULTANCY INPUT TO WNDC**

Steve Elsey, Head of Public Protection, referred to the briefing note adding that the informal agreement with WNDC is due to come to an end. However, Environmental Services will in the future be involved in making environmental comments formally but not necessarily at a pre determined stage. Environmental Services will still have an input into planning applications.

The update was noted.

## 9 BYELAW FOR GOOD RULE AND GOVERNMENT

Debbie MacColl, Community Safety Administration Officer, advised that byelaws are a complex process that follows guidance. Regarding the Byelaw for Good Rule and Government, renewed Government guidance and regulations are awaited. Community Safety has been working with the Home Office and has undertaken the pre-consultation stage and come up with a draft. As soon as the guidance is issued, Community Safety should be able to proceed relatively quickly. The Byelaw will permit the issuing of Fixed Penalty Notices.

The Committee asked questions, made comment and heard: -

- A byelaw can be created for anything that there is not already a regulation on but it has to be a criminal offence.
- Regarding a query whether a bicycle a self-propelled vehicle, Debbie MacColl confirmed that the Byelaw would not cover bicycles.
- In response to a query about skateboarding it was confirmed that areas that have been selected are because they are causing problems to pedestrians for the safety of both the general public and the skateboarders. This Council has an enforcement policy, which applies to byelaws. The purpose of the Skateboards Forum, comprising a variety of stakeholders, is to look at how a nationally significant skateboard park could be delivered in Northampton. The Skateboarders Forum has met once and a further meeting will be scheduled. The Chair asked that updates on the work of the Skateboarders' Forum be presented to this Committee.

**AGREED:** That regular updates on the work of the Skateboarders' Forum be presented to this Committee.

## 10 DRAFT BUDGET FOR 2010-11 TO 2012-2013

Gavin Chambers, Head of Finance and Assets, advised that the 2010-2013 draft budget was currently out to consultation. The budget would then be presented back to Cabinet and Council for approval post-consultation. This year, the same process as previously had been adopted for consulting Overview and Scrutiny on the Council's proposed budget. The Reporting and Monitoring Working Group would have been asked to select the issues from the budget proposals for each Overview and Scrutiny Committee but this meeting of the Reporting and Monitoring Task and Finish Group did not take place due to the inclement weather at that time.

Chris Cavanagh, Head of Regeneration, confirmed that Francis Fernandes, Borough Solicitor, had advised the Chair that due to the sensitivity of the issues and an agreed consultation process, it would not be possible for officers to reveal details of budget saving consultation proposals at this stage. Chris Cavanagh advised that he was currently in discussions with staff regarding the details around the options regarding the restructure of the Regeneration Department. It was reported that it is possible that some of the

Committee's questions might relate to individuals, as some posts are only specific to one post etc, in which case such questions could not be answered at this stage.

The Committee queried how comfortable the Council was that the proposed restructure would not impact on the regeneration of the town Chris Cavanagh advised the Committee that that the report had been driven by the Council's overriding need to make savings on its general budget. In terms of Regeneration and Development, a focus on delivery had been adopted in terms of finding options and focus on Council priorities. This had led to a restructure and focus on delivery of the Council's priority projects and initiatives.

Sue Bridge, Head of Planning, advised that in respect of the Planning Department, there was an intended minor internal structure to strengthen Planning policy, which will pick up some of the policy work done in Regeneration currently. Other proposed changes are in respect of income and operational efficiencies. In response to a query regarding whether the changes would have an impact on planning coming back to the borough, Sue Bridge advised that she had made provision for four additional posts in the establishment, which were not funded this year but were earmarked in reserves, by next year there will be more of a certainty regarding the need for these posts.

Chris Cavanagh suggested that Heads brief Overview and Scrutiny on details of the restructures and savings proposed presenting to a future meeting of this Committee once the one to one meetings with affected staff have been concluded.

The Committee made comment on two specific proposed options contained in the draft general fund budget 2010-11 to 2012-2013: -

- Savings for community centres of £170,000 may not be realized due to the work of the Community Task and Finish Group
- Concerns were conveyed regarding the proposed savings in the Regeneration and Planning and as to whether this might affect the regeneration of the Town Centre which is a priority for the Town.

The Committee further commented that there does not appear to be much substantiveness behind some of the proposals at this stage. The Committee was disappointed that the Portfolio Holders were not present at this meeting for consideration of this item.

Gavin Chambers advised that should something be taken out as part of the budget consultation process, it would need to be replaced with something else. There is a finite timescale when this process must be completed. The budget papers to Cabinet and Council in February 2010 will show clearly any amendments to the proposals.

The Chair commented on the failure to provide the correct financial information with regard to the proposed savings for Community Centres in the report provided to Committee members.

**AGREED:** (1) That Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 make the following comments on two specific proposed options contained in the draft general fund budget 2010-11 to 2012-2013: -

- Savings for Community Centres of £170,000 may not be realized due to the work of the Community Task and Finish Group
- Concerns were conveyed regarding the proposed savings in the Regeneration and Planning and as to whether this might affect progress of Central Area Action Plan and delivery of regeneration of Northampton and essential growth.

(2) That details of the proposed savings be presented to a future meeting of this Committee.

## **11 SINGLE EQUALITIES SCHEME – ACTION PLAN**

Consideration of this item was deferred to the next meeting on 19 April 2010.

## **12 MONITORING WORK PROGRAMME 2009/2010**

The Chair suggested that as an update on the review into WNDC had been provided earlier in the meeting there was not the need for the Committee to monitor the implementation of the accepted recommendations contained in the WNDC and partnership working with NBC report. It was suggested however that there was a need for Overview and Scrutiny to have an input into the statutory body that replaces WNDC.

### **12(A) COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION (CCfA) TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT**

Thomas Hall, Head of Policy, advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group had produced a pilot for CCfA. At its recent meeting the Constitutional Working Party had taken on board this piece of work and is producing a procedure for CCfA based on the work of the Task and Finish.

Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, advised that a draft Overview and Scrutiny CCfA Protocol has been produced, as has the relevant extract for inclusion in the Council's constitution and these were currently being worked upon by the Constitution Working Party and will be presented to full Council in March 2010 for approval. Thomas Hall added that CCfA has been a statutory instrument since April 2010 and there is a Protocol for using this but it had not been formally adopted.

Concerns were raised that the pilot for CCfA had never been set up or tested to check whether the process worked. The Committee was provided with details of proposed training on the scrutiny of crime and disorder and CCfA.

The Chair gave examples of a request for a CCfA to Northamptonshire County Council, which had not been able to go through the process.

The Committee commented on the need to test the pilot scheme for CCfA to ensure that it was the correct process to follow. Tracy Tiff undertook to circulate the flow chart contained in the Overview and Scrutiny CCfA Task and Finish Group to all Overview and Scrutiny Members.

## **13 TASK AND FINISH GROUP UPDATES**

### **13(A) COMMUNITY CENTRES TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

Mr Toby Birch, representing Alliston Gardens Community Centre, addressed the Committee commenting that the Centre had been running for around 14 years, it has 40 volunteers, employs its own staff. It is a very busy centre with approximately 500 people using centre a week, plus parties and other bookings. A lot of people use the centre. It is important that people that use the centre get the best out of it. It would be useful to have some kind of value added so that the Community Centre could show what it is doing in a positive way. Mr Birch confirmed that he would be very willing to work with the Borough Council to show what can be achieved. He added that it would be good to have a list of aims and objectives for Community Centres. There is a range of services provided by community centres such as I



ICT, which could be developed further. There is a need to demonstrate that Community Centres are providing value for money to the local communities. Mr Birch concluded that it is important that community activities are fully developed and Community Centres are used.

Keith Westhead, representing Kingsheath Resident Association, commented that his Committee felt that it was wrong to close down Community Centres. The Committee had the preference for NBC to continue to run Community Centres and if this were not possible the Committee would like to see them run by community groups. Mr Westhead referred to the Community Centre in Kingsheath advising that the Need to Know shop had offered to take over the management of the Community Centre. Mr Westfield felt that should Need to know take on the management of the Community Centre it would ensure its long-term viability. He asked that this be given every consideration.

The Committee put questions to Mr Westhead:

In response to a query about access to the Community Centre if Need to know took over the management of the Centre, Mr Westhead confirmed that most of the other rooms would be available as access for all.

In response to a query why Mr Westhead felt that Community Centres would be closed, he advised that he had read details in the local press from time to time that 11 or 12 would be closed, some had applications for management committees to take over, others had not. He added that the Council was looking to change the caretaking process to floating caretaker support, Mr Westhead felt that with this type of caretaking in place less people would use the Centres and therefore they would close.

Al Bell, Community Matters, commented that Community Matters is a national community organisation with a number of members. She advised that she had received concerns from a number of members regarding the work of the Task and Finish Group and the proposals for caretaking. Some centers have 170 volunteers with a footfall of 2,000. Al Bell gave examples of some of the services provided such as surgeries for police, mental health support, Councillors, adult learning sessions, legal and debt advice, exercise etc. Members are concerned that changes being discussed without consultation and are keen to engage with the Council and help to look for further efficiencies and make sure any changes do not have a detriment on the community. She commented that *she would encourage the Council to provide leases to organisations who are managing the Community Centres, without a lease, the management committees cannot access external funding*. Members of Community Matters had further concerns regarding the proposals for reduced caretaking, which in their opinion would invalidate insurance and create insufficient time to clean therefore making Community Centres less appealing. Al Bell concluded her address by asking what the running costs for Community Centres were and what is being spent on the buildings.

The Committee put questions to Al Bell:

- Community Matters has 1300 members nationally.
- In response to a query for examples of Local Authorities that run their Community Centres better than Northampton, Al Bell advised that everyone does this better than Northampton, for example Nottinghamshire and its outlining districts have a good relationship with their centres. Dialogue is an issue, keeping people updated, there is a need for Community Support Officers. In Al Bell's opinion other good examples were Lambeth and Watford. She offered to supply further information to the Committee.
- There were some examples of Parish Councils running Community Centres.

- The Community Builders Fund is Open till 31 March 2011 with funding of £70million across England.

Joyce Smith, Abington Community Centre, advised that this Centre was opened in 1949; her mother was a founder member. Many groups such as mums and tots, camera club are still operating from Abington Community Centre. She had concerns regarding the proposals for floating caretaking. Caretaking would not be covered by insurance; it would not allow enough time to clean. Joyce Smith asked the Committee to come and visit the centre. Joyce Smith concluded her address advising the Centre gives free use to youth and youth clubs.

The Committee put questions to Joyce Smith:

- Joyce Smith confirmed that she had met with Councillor Brian Hoare last year but had not been contacted since.
- Councillor Keith Davies confirmed that the Task and Finish Group had visited Abington Community Centre recently.

Elizabeth Percival of Parklands Community Centre ,commented that the Centre is very well run, it started off as a wooden hut. The management committee would like to work with NBC but feel they are not being included in discussions. Elizabeth Percival advised that she had heard rumours about the proposals but had not received any official notification from the Council. Parklands Community Centre has security cameras and outside shutters. A lot of local groups use the Community Centers and if the Management Committees had to pay for a caretaker, the hire of use of the centre would have to be increased. Parklands Community Centre has a lot of volunteers who help to run the Community Centre. Elizabeth Percival concluded her address by stating that one size does not fit all, as all community centres are different.

In response to a query Elizabeth Percival addressed that Parklands Community Centre has around 50 volunteers.

Sandra Bell, interim director of the Doddridge Centre addressed the Committee commenting that the Doddridge Centre had been asked to put in a bid to run St James Community Centre but since the initial suggestion there had been no further contact. Sandra Bell felt that there was a lack of consistency in approach in informing the Community Centres. Users of the Community Centres should be consulted. To diminish community centres is a detrimental step.

Eric Atkins of Duston Community Association commented that the Centre had been built with public subscription and the Association had owned the building for 28 years but it is now owned by NBC. He suggested ways of helping community centres. Eric Atkins added that the Centre is made up of sections – each runs itself, such as photography, two bowls sections.

Stephen Richards, of Alliston Gardens Community Centre, commented that most people look at Community Centres as “black hole for tipping in money” but do not see any value for what is given to a centre. Abington Community Centre is spending twice the Borough spend to provide quality services. Four hours a week caretaking would provide for nothing. Stephen Richards commented that the Community Centres are not being consulted and asked for their opinions, neither are the community users. The risk assessment for the proposals does not make reference to the ‘drop out rate’ some users wont continue to use if they are required to do cleaning too. He concluded his address by advising that he had been invited to the Task and Finish Group to give evidence as a flagship community centre.

In order to increase community provision Abington Community Centre could run a number of the borough run community centres, some of which do not have a sign with a number for hiring etc. Funding bids from National Lottery etc could be attracted. Other options such as this need exploring.

Councillor Tony Clarke addressed the Committee asking for its permission for the Task and Finish Group to finish its work. He was concerned the budget was driving policy. Last year the Council said it was going to reduce expenditure on community centres but at the time Councillors needed to understand how Community Centres worked. The Task and Finish Group started its work as an Appreciative Inquiry in October 2009 and is due to conclude in April 2010. Councillor Clarke's main concern was in respect of consultation regarding the caretaking of community centres, he felt that this would have an impact upon the work of the Task and Finish Group. Funding is imperative. Councillor Clarke concluded his address by commenting that all the Task and Finish Group's work will be worthless if the budget is reduced at this time. It was added that the Task and Finish Group held a very thorough evidence-gathering meeting last time. He asked for breaks on the budget, commenting that hopefully the Task and Finish Group will deliver a policy that can deliver.

The Chair thanked the public attendees for their addresses,

The Chair confirmed that the budget proposals are currently out for consultation.

The Committee referred to the scope of the Review commencing that it does not make reference to the Community. It was confirmed that the Task and Finish Group had visited community centres and had dialogue with users.

Councillor Paul Varnsberry, Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, commented that this meeting had received a lot of information, which would help to inform the work of the Task and Finish Group. He emphasised that there was no truth in the rumours regarding closing down Community Centre. The Administration is not looking to close community centres; Northampton is going to need more community centres, not less. There is a need to ensure that they are providing value for money. One size does not fit all. Some community centers are used more than others, and this needs to be included in a Policy. He commented that he has invited the Task and Finish Group to assist in putting this Policy together and he looks forward to the Task and Finish Group's final report.

The Committee commented that the Task and Finish Group has visited lots of community centres recently.

Thomas Hall clarified that the job description is part of the restructure consultations and that the Task and Finish Group has recently had sight of the consultation documents. The proposals are suggesting a cut of 18 FTE caretakers to eight. The Task and Finish Group's scope is concerned with Policy in relation to:-

- the provision of premises for community use, and
- the role of Northampton Borough Council in such provision
- to monitor any budget proposals in relation to community centres

The Committee commented that the level of caretaking that the Council provides to Community Centres should be part of the Task and Finish Group's evidence, therefore budget proposals need to stop until Task and Finish Group has concluded its work.

The Committee queried whether the Task and Finish Group was looking at the role of NCC. NCC's provision for youth and elderly appears to be missing, and it was queried how their

strategy fit in with the use of the community centres. NCC has a duty to be inputting into this process.

Councillor David Palethorpe commented that the Task and Finish Group would talk to the end users but a chunk of the Group's work seems to have been taken away by the budget proposals.

The Committee was asked to approve the scope of the Review, noting progress made to date.

**AGREED:** That the scope of the Community Centres Task and Finish Group be agreed.

The meeting adjourned at 7.15pm and reconvened at 7.25pm

#### **14 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 – WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee noted its work programme.

#### **15 BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATOR MONITORING**

The Committee noted the Best Value Performance Indicators for the period November 2009.

Violent crimes and burglaries are a major crime for this town; these types of reported crimes are inclined to drop off in bad weather.

This Council has worked very hard and well with people subject to domestic violent crime.

Thomas Hall added that the figure for the Performance Indicator for domestic burglary is still red, but only just. The Council has never been anywhere near this target for some time.

#### **16 FORWARD PLAN**

The current Forward Plan was noted.

#### **17 . URGENT ITEMS**

There were none.

The meeting concluded at 21.00 hrs