

SCRUTINY

NEWSLETTER



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ISSUE 9 DECEMBER 2009

introduction

Welcome to the **December 2009** edition of the Overview and Scrutiny Newsletter. This is the tenth edition and in it we would like to update you on the latest developments on scrutiny here in Northampton.

We also want to alert you to reports and meetings which may be of interest to you. If you have any questions about the scrutiny function, or about how to get involved, please email **Tracy Tiff**, Scrutiny Officer, on ttiff@northampton.gov.uk who will be very happy to respond to your query.

Further information can also be found on the Overview and Scrutiny webpages - www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees and their Task and Finish Groups have an excellent record of Scrutiny Councillors working together impartially; this has been best demonstrated in recent Call In hearings and during the Task and Finish Group reviews.



Councillor John Yates
Chair, Overview and Scrutiny
Management Committee

Chair's welcome

the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

I was recently appointed Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and I am looking forward to working with other Chairs, Vice Chairs and Scrutiny Members in further developing Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton Borough Council.

Scrutiny plays a key role in assisting the Executive and Cabinet in the improvement journey. All Local Authorities face similar challenges; the current funding model by Central Government starves all Local Authorities of funding irrespective of their star rating. Funding that is available has to be competed for and there is no guarantee of success. One response to this funding model has been for Local Authorities to start 'thinking outside the box' and various partnership and joint working groups are being formed and investigated. Scrutiny has an important role to play in this quest for better services for less money. We need to ensure that we have a proactive and effective Overview and Scrutiny function, as this will benefit not just the Council but also the citizens of Northampton.

Overview and Scrutiny Reviews

Centre for Public Scrutiny Report - Global Challenge, Local Solutions: the role of scrutiny, audit and inspection in tackling the recession

The recently completed scrutiny review undertaken by Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 (Partnerships, Regeneration, Community Safety and Engagement) was referred to in the Centre for Public Scrutiny's report - Global Challenge, Local Solutions: the role of scrutiny, audit and inspection in tackling the recession.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny commented: -

"This review looked at work undertaken by West Northants Development Corporation (WNDC) in the context of the recession. WNDC was established as a result of disappointing CPA results for Northampton several years ago, to take on some important economic development and regeneration functions. The review focused on services being delivered through partnerships both partnership between the council and the WNDC, and other local bodies.



Recommendations were developed which focused on WDC being more proactive about joint working, and the council developing more capacity to enhance development control (planning services). A recommendation for a clear vision, backed up by a strong Local Development Framework, is a part of this. Comparative information from other parts of the country was collected and analysed to formulate recommendations.

By looking at similar development corporations (there are three others nationwide), the committee were able to make recommendations which it knew were realistic and stood a better chance of resulting in positive change. Assessment, on the basis of the above, of the way in which partnership arrangements centred on economic development might need to change to meet the challenge of the recession. Recommendations stated that partnerships' individual and collective priorities should alter.

Overall outcome

The review recommended that the WDC should now "pump prime and encourage development in difficult economic times, rather than over-develop". This is an important finding, which has implications beyond the terms of this review alone it indicates how scrutiny can recommend that organisations and their priorities can and should change in the context of the recession. Many of these issues relate to funding."

Scrutiny of Crime and Disorder

The Police and Justice Act 2006 made a provision for a wide range of changes to the way in which Community Safety Partnerships fulfil their responsibilities in relation to tackling crime, disorder and substance misuse in their locality. These changes include the requirement that local authorities' scrutiny structures should consider crime and disorder matters, and will come to force on the 1st of October 2009.

The Constitution Working Group is looking at proposals for the way forward.

Strengthening Local Democracy

The Council provided a response to the consultation on the Government Green Paper 'Strengthening Local Democracy'. The paper summarises plans to increase the range of Scrutiny and extend its powers to scrutinise all local partners, including: fire and rescue authorities, probation authorities, public transport, Jobcentre Plus and utility companies.

Councillor Call for Action

In 2008, Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 suggested a pilot process for Councillor Call for Action (CCfA). This process was accepted by Cabinet. The Constitution Working Group is currently updating the constitution and will be looking to including the Council's Councillor Call for Action process into the constitution.

Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) provides an opportunity for a councillor to raise an issue at a meeting of one of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees when it has not proved possible to resolve the matter in any other forum. It provides an opportunity for a matter to be discussed in a public forum and will augment the Council's overview and scrutiny role.

Although no CCfAs have been logged as yet, Councillors are aware of the process and the Scrutiny Officer is ready and willing to assist.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny has recently published a document on CCfA -

Action stations? The first six months of the Councillor Call for Action

Which can be located on its website

 www.cfps.org

This publication takes stock six months after the Act came into force, and looks at the work that councils have been doing to see if the Councillor Call for Action has been useful and whether the barriers identified above are justified. This document also provides some practical tips for enhancing the way that local authorities and their partners approach CCfA

Scrutiny Events

Scrutiny Workshops

In the spring 2010 a workshop will be held for all Scrutiny Councillors to discuss ideas for scrutiny work programme for the new municipal year. The Cabinet will be asked to attend to give details of their priorities for the year, along with the Council's Directors and several Heads of Service and Managers who will be able highlight the key activity in each directorate. After speaking to Cabinet Members and Officers the Scrutiny members will discuss their priorities for the year. Co opted members to Reviews that have taken place during 2009/2010 will be invited to the event, along with the Chair of the Northamptonshire Countywide Scrutiny Forum.



Scrutiny Training for Officers

A whole day seminar for Managers took place recently and covered: -

- **A national perspective on scrutiny**
- **Scrutiny Principles and Practices**
- **Councillor/employee relationships in scrutiny, eg being a witness**
- **Officer involvement and support in Scrutiny**
- **Good Practice case studies**
- **Scrutiny terms of reference and protocols in Northampton Borough Council**
- **Preparation for being called as a witness to a Scrutiny Committee meeting/call-in hearing etc.**
- **Framing reports for submission to Scrutiny**
- **Information for Scrutiny Reviews**
- **Role-play - "being called as a witness Overview and Scrutiny**

The training was well received. Attendees were provided with a written response to any queries that they had regarding the Overview and Scrutiny process at Northampton.

Four year rolling Training and Development Programme for Scrutiny Members

A programme of training and development opportunities for Scrutiny Members for a four-year period has been recently agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. Some of the training will be provided in house - for example provided by the Scrutiny Officer - and other training; such as Chairing and Vice Chairing skills, will be given by an external provider.

In addition to the training programme, Scrutiny Members will have a number of opportunities to develop skills, knowledge and experience over the course of the period. In particular Scrutiny Members will be offered briefings and pre meetings to support them in carrying out specific pieces of scrutiny work. Members are also encouraged to approach the Scrutiny Officer or the Senior Training Officer with suggestions for further development opportunities that they think are necessary as the programme progresses.

Ad hoc training on any forthcoming legislation will be scheduled into the programme as appropriate.

What's happening in Overview and Scrutiny?

Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee continues to make progress on the areas of work identified in the Work Programme at the beginning of the Council year.

Recently completed/nearing completion More Facilities for Older Children

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees asked the public to suggest issues for inclusion onto the work programme 2008/2009. Questionnaires were circulated at the town's Balloon Festival in August 2008. The management committee evaluated the suggestions and produced a ballot form containing the top ten issues. At the Local Democracy Week event held at the Guildhall, a vote took place for the item for inclusion onto the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme - More Facilities for Older Children obtained the most votes.

The Review concluded its evidence gathering and reported its finding to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee at its meeting on **14 December 2009**.

Concessionary Fares

An Appreciative Inquiry has just completed its review regarding the recent changes to the concessionary fares system. The Concessionary Fares Appreciative Inquiry has reported its findings to both the parent Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

Current Reviews

Cost of Consultants to the Authority -

A Task and Finish Group has scoped its Review and is now mid-evidence gathering. It is expected to report its findings in the spring 2010.

Reporting and Monitoring Working Group -

An Overview and Scrutiny Working Group was set up to investigate the budget proposals. It has monitored the effects of the budget changes and reported back. It will shortly begin to investigate any budget proposals for 2010/2011 and will later in 2010 monitor any effect.

Sheltered Housing and Housing Options for Older People

A Task and Finish Group, with a co-opted County Council Member and Officer, is now mid-evidence gathering with a number of site visits scheduled. It has met with the Pensioners and Disabled Peoples' Forums and obtained their views on sheltered housing and housing options for older people.



The purpose of the Review is:-

- To establish whether the Sheltered Housing Service provides a value for money service and how it can be improved.
- To establish residents' satisfaction levels and understanding of Sheltered Housing and Housing Options for Older People
- To determine a better understanding of the complex nature of Sheltered Housing



Community Centres

This Review commenced as an Appreciative Inquiry and became a Task and Finish Group on 3 December 2009. The purpose of the Review is:

To support the development of policy in relation to:-


- the provision of premises for community use, and
- the role of Northampton Borough Council in such provision

The Review is scheduled to conclude its findings early in 2010.

Garages Appreciative Inquiry


The Appreciative Inquiry is supporting the development of policy in relation to Council owned garages.

The Review is scheduled to conclude its findings early in 2010.

 Copies of all Overview and Scrutiny Review Reports can be located www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny

How to get Involved

There are a number of ways in which you can find out about the work of Overview and Scrutiny.

 If you want to know more please refer to the Overview and Scrutiny WebPages on the Council's website under Council, Government and Democracy: www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny

Dates for your diary

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1	Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2	Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee
2010 <input type="checkbox"/> 25 January <input type="checkbox"/> 19 April <input type="checkbox"/> 21 June	2010 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 February <input type="checkbox"/> 5 May <input type="checkbox"/> 7 July	2010 <input type="checkbox"/> 13 January commencing at 7.15pm <input type="checkbox"/> 13 May <input type="checkbox"/> 22 July	2010 <input type="checkbox"/> 29 March <input type="checkbox"/> 7 June

Overview and Scrutiny is an accessible and public process. Details of all agendas and minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny committees are published and can be located via this link to **Council Meetings**.

Very occasionally the Overview and Scrutiny Committees meet in private which will be for the minimum time needed to consider information that may be sensitive or otherwise confidential in order to protect the interests of external agencies and individuals.

Who to contact

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee



Councillor John Yates (Chair)



Councillor Pam Varnserry (Vice Chair)

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 (Housing and Environment)



Councillor Christopher Malpas (Chair)



Councillor Pam Varnserry (Vice Chair)

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 (Partnerships, Regeneration, Community Safety and Engagement)



Councillor John Yates (Chair)



Councillor Ifty Choudary (Vice Chair)

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 (Improvement, Performance and Finance)



Councillor Jamie Lane (Chair)



Councillor David Garlick (Vice Chair)



Feedback Questionnaire

To help us make sure this newsletter is useful and informative, please complete the questions below and return to the Overview and Scrutiny Officer.

Did you find this newsletter useful in understanding the role of Overview and Scrutiny?

If not, why?

Is there anything about this newsletter that you would like to change?

Which article did you find most interesting?

Contact Information

Email address: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ **Postcode:** _____

Please tick this box if you wish to receive information from Northampton Borough Council regarding Overview and Scrutiny.

Thank you for filling in this questionnaire.

