COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillor Dennis Meredith (Chair); Councillors Tony Ansell, Rufia Ashraf, Anamul Haque (Enam), Jamie Lane, Zoe Smith and Graham Walker


OFFICER: Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer

1. APOLOGIES
Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brian Oldham and Phil Larratt.

2. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES
There were none.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)
There were none.

4. MINUTES
The minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2015 were signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

5. WITNESS EVIDENCE
(A) CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY, NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL, (NBC)
The Scrutiny Panel noted a written response to the core questions from the Cabinet Member for Community Safety. The salient points contained within the written responses were noted.

The Scrutiny Panel asked questions, made comment and heard:
In answer to a query regarding whether anti-social behaviour had been observed during a recent Guide Dog event in the town centre, Councillor King confirmed that during this event she had not observed anti-social behaviour or littering. Police presence had been observed and she had nothing to report.

The Chair commented that during his recent walkabout of the town centre he had noted a number of street drinkers by the fountain the town centre. Councillor King confirmed that underlying work with other Agencies is underway, through the Community Safety Partnership and health providers; looking to provide help and assistance to vulnerable people.

The work of the Neighbourhood Wardens was commended.

The Scrutiny Panel welcomed the variety of projects that the Community Safety Partnership has put in place to address anti-social behaviour, such as street football, street and school pastors etc. In relation to how these are advertised and promoted, Councillor King confirmed that the communication team uses a variety of methods including social media to promote the activities. It was suggested that ward Councillors could promote such activities within their wards, for example using community notices boards. It was suggested that a potential recommendation of the final report could be around Councillors promoting such activities within their wards.

The Scrutiny Panel commented that street drinkers often move from the town centre to Delapre and Briar Hill. The Chair acknowledged that from his recent site visit he had observed the good rapport that the Neighbourhood Wardens have with street drinkers.

In answer to a query regarding new legislation, Ruth Austen confirmed that new powers are available to local authorities to make Public Spaces Protection Orders but each Council has to adopt these, they have to be appropriate and enforceable. There is a legal process that has to be followed.

In response to a query regarding skateboarders near to St Giles church, Councillor King confirmed that she would report this issue to the Community Safety Partnership.

In response to a question about the recruitment of Special Constables; Ruth Austen confirmed that recruitment is progressing. Lots of Special Constables have already been engaged and some more are in the final stages of training. A presentation from a Special Constable had been given to the Police and Crime Panel. It was suggested that it would be useful for this Scrutiny Panel to have sight of the presentation. It was therefore requested that a copy is forwarded to the Scrutiny Panel.

It was suggested that if the Scrutiny Panel has any supplementary questions to put to the Police when a representative attends a future meeting; that it would be useful for Members to forward their individual queries to the Chair so that questions could be collated and forwarded to the Police in advance of the meeting.

The Scrutiny Panel commented that there was anecdotal evidence that Market Traders were concerned about anti-social behaviour in the Market Square. It was noted that the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Markets Action Group had been invited to attend a future meeting of the Scrutiny Panel and provide a response to the core questions.

In response to a query regarding PCSOs, Councillor King confirmed that after Northamptonshire County Council had withdrawn its funding for PCSOs, NBC had also and had then put its funding into Park Rangers.
Councillor King was thanked for her informative address.

AGREED: That the information provided informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.

(B) ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION MANAGER, NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDENS, PARK RANGER, NBC

The Scrutiny Panel noted a written response to the core questions from the Environmental Services (Direct Services) Manager, Neighbourhood Wardens and Park Rangers. The salient points contained within the written responses were noted.

The job role of the Neighbourhood Wardens and Park Rangers was provided to the Scrutiny Panel.

The Scrutiny Panel asked questions, made comment and heard:

- The Scrutiny Panel heard about the Junior Warden Scheme which is run in a number of ways. It is cost effective as it comprises officer time, support from Agencies and a presentation. If trips were involved it would cost in the region of £500-£700. It would be possible to use some of the Junior Warden Schemes in schools, for example one has been run in Spring Lane School. The children are shown how CCTV works in the town centre for example. Educating children young can create effective advocates. Around 5-6 Junior Warden Schemes are run a year, up to a maximum of ten schemes.
- The Scrutiny Panel referred to “Hazard Alley” in Milton Keynes and commended its effectiveness. It is a unit that has a mock set up of various scenes such as fire safety, home safety etc. It was felt that such a facility in Northampton would be useful. Hazard Alley is run by a Charity. A potential recommendation of the final report was suggested around further educating children on issues around anti-social behaviour.
- It was felt that it would be useful if members of the Panel could visit “Hazard Alley”.
- In answer to a comment that the previous shelter that had been available for street drinkers had been useful, Ruth Austen commented that such a shelter had existed but there had also been negative feedback. The re-installation of such a shelter could be investigated. The Scrutiny Panel acknowledged that there is also a need to provide assistance and support to such vulnerable people.
- The work of the Street Pastors was commended. It was acknowledged that Street Pastors are mainly volunteers. It was felt that evidence from religious groups would be useful to the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review. Street Pastors would be contacted, along with other Agencies and Religious Groups and a briefing note presented to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Panel detailing the support that they provide to street drinkers.
- The work of the Salvation Army was noted.
- The Scrutiny Panel highlighted the need for a paper document that details where street drinkers, rough sleepers and beggars can go for assistance. Councillors could then distribute such documents. This was felt to be an important potential recommendation of the final report.
In answer to a query regarding the issuing of Fixed Penalty Notices, the Park Ranger confirmed that 7-8 are issues per period.

The Chair commented that from his walkabout of the town centre he felt there was the need for further training for Neighbourhood Wardens, particularly in relation to Street Drinkers. It was highlighted that all newly recruited Neighbourhood Wardens had received training delivered by the University and all Neighbourhood Wardens had received training on handling confrontation situations.

The Park Ranger confirmed that he works closely with PCSOs.

Park Rangers cover similar issues to that of Neighbourhood Wardens but in parks and open spaces. Weekend work is undertaken. Mainly, Park Rangers are lone workers. 1:1s take place and objectives set. There are five Park Rangers, two of which are full time of 40 hours a week, one works 37.5 hours and two 20 hours a week.

The Chair suggested that it would be useful for Neighbourhood Wardens to be issued with a body camera and felt this would be a useful potential recommendation of the final report.

Ruth Austen, Jason Toyne and Andrew Langton were thanked for their informative address.

AGREED: That the information provided informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.

(C) ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND LICENSING MANAGER, NBC

The Scrutiny Panel noted a written response to the core questions from the Environmental Health and Licensing Manager. The salient points contained within the written responses were noted.

The Scrutiny Panel asked questions, made comment and heard:

- In response to a concern regarding the selling of one can of alcohol to individuals, particularly early in the morning; Ruth Austen confirmed that she would report this issue to the Licensing Team.
- Environmental Health and Licensing has excellent joint working with the Police, with excellent exchange of information.
- In response to a query regarding a licensed premise opening near to a car park and the potential for anti-social behaviour, Ruth Austen confirmed that the Statement of Licensing Principles is currently out for consultation. There is a need for evidence to back up any actions taken. It is not normally possible to provide evidence of problems before a premises opens and so it is difficult to limit times on new licences. All licences are monitored.
- The Scrutiny Panel felt that alcohol and drugs were a key factor to anti-social behaviour and there was the need to look at opening hours; this could be a potential recommendation of the final report to the Licensing Committee.
The Chair suggested that it would be useful for the Scrutiny Panel to report any acts of anti-social behaviour that it observes.

AGREED: That the information provided informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.

(D) TOWN CENTRE MANAGER

The Scrutiny Panel noted a written response to the core questions from the Town Centre Manager. The salient points contained within the written responses were noted.

The Scrutiny Panel asked questions, made comment and heard:

- The Scrutiny Panel reported that they had observed “pink balls” for people to dispose of chewing gum in and commended this idea. The Town Centre Manager advised that he had not had sight of these but would investigate; he highlighted that the pavements do receive a deep steam clean to remove chewing gum.
- The Scrutiny Panel discussed Talking CCTV cameras.
- Concern was raised regarding the number of street drinkers present by All Saints church. The Town Centre Manager advised that he regularly carries out walkabouts of the town centre and reports back his findings to Enterprise. If he notes incidents photographs are taken. The Town Centre Manager liaises with all Agencies. He added that he is aware of street drinking, begging and anti-social behaviour. The Town Centre Manager’s team is responsible for cleaning up and any incidents are reported to the relevant department or Agency. A number of street drinkers, for example, have underlying issues and there is a need to refer them to the correct Agency for the foundations for support.
- The night time economy was referred to. The Town Centre Manager advised that the cleaning regime had changed to address this, as some night clubs are open till 6am. Cleaning takes place first thing in the morning.
- In response to a query about psychoactive substances and shops selling these in the town, the Town Centre Manager advised that it is not illegal to sell these substances to people aged 18 and above. The substances state that they must not be drunk, inhaled, smoked etc. It is illegal to sell them to minors. There was a shop in the town centre that did sell psychoactive substances to a minor, they were prosecuted and the shop has since closed down. Shops that sell psychoactive substances in the town are monitored.
- The Scrutiny Panel referred to acts of anti-social behaviour outside a pub in the town centre and the Town Centre Manager confirmed that action is being taken to rectify this.
- The Scrutiny Panel felt that issues such as times that shops can sell alcohol, such as early in the morning, causes such problems. A potential recommendation of the final could be around recommending to the Licensing Committee that such conditions on certain licences are reviewed. It was felt that this would take away the problems of street drinkers that are present early in the morning in the town centre.

Derrick Simpson was thanked for his informative address.
AGREED: That the information provided informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.

6. BACKGROUND DATA
The Scrutiny Panel received a briefing note that detailed various pieces of legislation.

AGREED: That the information provided informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.

The meeting concluded at 7:46pm