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introduction

Welcome to the first edition of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny E-Bulletin, the e-mail newsletter of Northampton Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which is available for employees and the public

The bulletin will keep you up to date with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Task and Finish Group news, training events, additions to the website, forthcoming meetings and new developments.



Who is involved in Scrutiny

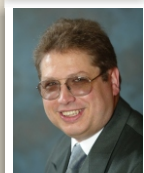


The new Overview and Scrutiny Committee was set up in September 2005 and comprises fourteen councillors representing each political group:

Councillor Brendan Glynane (Chair)
Telephone: **(01604) 453833**
Email cldr.bglynane@northampton.gov.uk

Councillor Christopher Malpas (Deputy Chair)
(Chair of the Public Engagement and Communications Task and Finish Group)
Telephone **(01604) 233640**
Email cldr.cmalpas@northampton.gov.uk

Councillor Anjona Roy (Deputy Chair)
(Chair of the Protocol Working Group)
Telephone **07976 260268**
Email cldr.roy@northampton.gov.uk



What is Overview and Scrutiny ?

Councillors who are not in the Cabinet are charged with keeping an overview of Council business and scrutinising areas of particular interest or concern.

Their role is to hold the Cabinet to account, when deemed necessary, in the business they undertake and to assist in the development and review of Council policy. The latter task involves looking in detail at areas of service delivery or issues of general concern and making recommendations to the Cabinet or to the whole Council.



councillors: -

1 Marion Allen



2 Richard Church

3 Brandon Eldred



4 Michael Hill

5 Brian Hoare



6 Michelle Hoare

7 Jamie Lane
(Chair of the Planning Task and Finish Group)



8 Margaret Pritchard

9 Lee Mason
(Chair of the Homelessness Task and Finish Group)



10 Andrew Simpson

11 Liz Tavener



Task and Finish Groups

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee sets up time limited Task and Finish Groups to carry out important reviews, which will make focussed valuable recommendations to the Cabinet.

All non-cabinet Councillors can put themselves forward to join Task and Finish Groups to review issues of interest and importance and inform critical policy development.

Look out for the new Annual Scrutiny Work Programme, get in touch with your whip and get involved.

Three Tasks and Finish Groups are currently carrying out investigations and will report their final findings to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6 April. The Groups are gathering evidence from a range of stakeholders and will produce reports, with recommendations, for the Cabinet to consider. You will find these reports on the Council's website under Council Government and Democracy.

Planning Task and Finish Group

This Group is reviewing the effectiveness of the Planning Committee for the Council and the public. It is looking into the issues of long meetings, long agendas and effective public inclusion.

The Group has carried out desktop research looking at models of good practice, research with other councils, interviewed internal and external witnesses, observed a Northampton Borough Council's Planning Committee and observed a Planning Committee of another Authority. The Planning Task and Finish Group has now reached its conclusions.

Homelessness Task and Finish Group

This Group is carrying out its review in partnership with Northamptonshire County Council. It is reviewing homelessness as a whole system, including the interactions between and the pressures on both Council's to improve the quality of life for people vulnerable to becoming homeless and to reduce the overall level of homelessness.

So far the Group has heard from a witness from the ODPM (a meeting was held in February with the ODPM representative for housing), interviewed and obtained written evidence from internal and external witnesses and gathered statistics and data. Councillors have visited the Housing and Money Advice Centre and the Homelessness Unit observing customer/staff interaction. The Task and

Finish Group will present its conclusions to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 6 April 2006.

Public Engagement and Communications Task and Finish Group

As the subject is vast, the Task and Finish Group concentrated on a focussed area - examining the level of residents feeling the Council consults and involves them and to increase the level of residents who are satisfied/very satisfied with the council by April 2006.

The Task and Finish Group has interviewed key front line staff, carried out desk top research, looking at models of good practice visited a best practice authority and gathered statistical information and data. The information gathered will contribute to the Task and Finish Group's final report

Protocol Working Group

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee felt that it was essential for good practice protocols and guidance information to be produced to ensure the effective functioning of Scrutiny. The Working Group has produced a witness protocol and a protocol for Public Address at Scrutiny, and is currently putting together a Call In Protocol, a Protocol for the inclusion of non Cabinet Councillors in the scrutiny process and a Scrutiny Work Programme Protocol. The Protocols and guidance information will be published on the Council's website under Council Government and Democracy.

A critical friend to the Council

The check and balance arm of scrutiny had its first test of the new scrutiny arrangements when the Sixfields decision of the Cabinet of the 5th December 2005 was called in on the grounds that it would put this Council at significant risk.

Meetings were held to scope out the call-in. The call in took place on the 11th January 2006, witnesses from the Northampton Town Football Club, West Northamptonshire Development Corporation, and members of staff from NBC were called to give oral evidence and to be questioned. Submitted written evidence and background documents were also considered by the call-in. The meeting lasted a long six hours.

The completed report was submitted to the Cabinet, which welcomed the report, accepted the findings in full and in addition added its own recommendations for the future conduct of Cabinet. The report can be view on line at the NBC web site.

Staff Involvement

It is important that the local community and staff within all departments of the Council are aware of, and engaged when appropriate, in the Scrutiny process.

Senior staff may be asked to give evidence to the Committee or a Task and Finish Group, either in writing or in person, on an area of their work. Training Sessions will be run for members of staff who may be called as witnesses by the new Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Details of which will be published shortly.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has produced a Witness Protocol, which will help explain the process. External witnesses will also be given support.

Staff could also become involved in the Scrutiny process by:-

- Explaining the value of scrutiny generally, or the work of any Task and Finish Group, to your service users
- Suggesting topics to your departmental Manager that you think should be reviewed by a future Task and Finish Group.
- Suggesting a local resident or community representative who would be an effective Co-optee on a Task and Finish Group.

Forthcoming Meetings

All Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings are held in public and anyone is welcome to attend. Agendas and minutes are published on the Council's website under Council, Government and Democracy.

Meeting	Date of Meeting	Venue
Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Thursday 6 April at 7.00pm	Jeffery Room at the Guildhall
Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Wednesday 14 June at 6.00pm	Jeffery Room at the Guildhall

Annual Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee sets and maintains a work programme, which it regularly updates.

The Annual Scrutiny Work Programme consists of a number of the highest priority topics that the Committee and its Task and Finish Groups will review and monitor. The Committee is currently considering items for inclusion on its Work Programme for the next Municipal Year and is looking at including some of the following issues:-

- **Dispersal Orders**
- **Local Area Agreements (LAA)**
- **Issues from the Authority's Recovery Plan**
- **Independent Remuneration Panel**
- **Mayoralty**

The Committee will agree its Annual Work Programme 2006/2007 soon and it will be published shortly afterwards.

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will publish its Annual Report 2005/2006 shortly.

The report will summarise the work of the Committee over the previous Municipal Year. It will detail the ways in which the Overview and Scrutiny function has developed using innovative ways of gathering evidence.



Get Involved

There are a number of ways in which you can find out about the work of Overview and Scrutiny. Details of all of the current reviews are given on page 2 but if you want to know more you can...

Attend a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

All Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings are held in public and anyone is welcome to attend to listen to the proceedings. The majority of Overview and Scrutiny meetings are held in the Jeffery Room at the Guildhall, St Giles Square, Northampton. Seats are available at the back of the committee room for members of the public and times and date of forthcoming meetings are published on the Council's website under Council, Government and Democracy. Only on rare occasions, when certain types of confidential information are being discussed, are members of the public not allowed to attend Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings.

As well as wanting to keep people informed about Overview and Scrutiny, the Councillors on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Task and Finish Groups are keen to hear your views on the topics they are looking at. There are a number of ways in which your views can be heard by the Councillors. You can..

Write to the Task and Groups

If you have a particular interest in a review you can write to or e-mail the relevant Task and Finish Group to give your views to the Councillors. If you do choose to make a contribution to a Task and Finish Group's review any comments you make will not be made public unless you have agreed to this.

Become a Witness

One of the main ways in which the Task and Finish Groups gather the evidence they need to inform their reviews is through inviting individuals with a particular knowledge of the subject to attend their meetings. This enables the councillors to make better informed recommendations but it also gives individuals and organisations from outside the Council a way of having their voice heard.

Is there anything you would like the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review?

The Committee welcomes suggestions for topics of inquiries and will consider issues put forward by members of the public, interest groups or businesses.

Suggestions for review must meet the following criteria:-

- affect a group or community of people (scrutiny will not usually look at individual service complaints)
- relate to a service, event or issue in which the council has a significant stake
- not be an issue which overview and scrutiny has considered during the last 12 months
- not be a planning issue or other matter dealt with by another Council Committee, except where the issue relates to process.

Receipt of your request will be acknowledged within 10 working days. You will be advised if the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will include the issue on its future work programme.

Why not fill out the online form to suggest a subject for review. Alternatively, please write, telephone or fax.



Northampton Borough Council

The Guildhall, St. Giles Square
Northampton NN1 1DE



01604 837408



01604 837295

Website



For more information on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or the time limited Task and Finish Groups please visit our website:

www.northampton.gov.uk

Scrutiny can be found under the section **Council Government and Democracy**.

Watch out for the Summer edition of the Scrutiny newsletter, which will detail Scrutiny news, including details of the final reports of the Task and Finish Groups.

Feedback

We are always looking at ways we can improve the information the e-bulletin provides so we need your feedback!

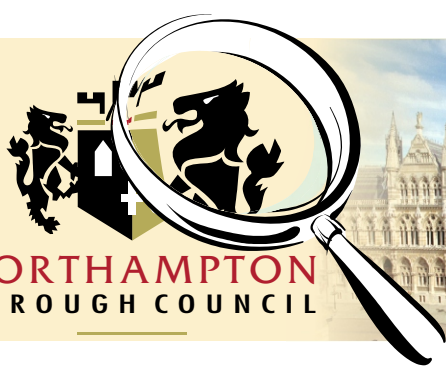
You can sign up to receive e-mail or hard copies of the **Scrutiny Newsletter** by



telephoning Tracy Tiff on 01604 837408



Or email ttiff@northampton.gov.uk



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

REFERRAL FORM

Please complete this form if you wish to raise an issue for Overview and Scrutiny to consider and return it to:

Northampton Borough Council The Guildhall, St. Giles Square, Northampton Nn1 1DE
Telephone: 01604 837408 **Fax:** 01604 837395 **Email:** ttiff@northampton.gov.uk

1 What would you like Overview and Scrutiny to investigate? Please state the service area, Council activity or topic:

2 Please state briefly why you would like this matter examined:

3 Have you had any previous contact with the Council or your local Councillor concerning this matter? If so, please give details:

4 Please give us your details so that we can contact you. Details will remain confidential and will not be released into the public domain. Forms without contact details will not be considered

Receipt of your request will be acknowledged within 10 working days. You will be advised if the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will include the issue on its future work programme.