

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 4 February 2019

COUNCILLORS PRESENT Councillor Jamie Lane (Chair), Councillor Graham Walker (Deputy Chair); Councillors Jane Birch, Alan Bottwood, Terrie Eales, Paul Joyce, Dennis Meredith, Cathrine Russell and Brian Sargeant

Councillor Mike Hallam
Councillor Tim Hadland
Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Councillor Anna King
Councillor Brandon Eldred
Rick O Farrell, Head of Economy,
Assets and Culture
Neil Darwin, Economic
Development Consultant
Marion Goodman, Head of
Customers and Culture
Chris Carvell, Environmental
Services Contract Manager
Stuart McGregor, Section 151
Officer

Councillor Jonathan Nunn –
observing
Councillor Phil Larratt – observing
Councillor Danielle Stone -
observing
Councillor Sally Beardsworth
George Candler, Chief Executive
Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer

Press James Averill, Democracy Reporter

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Aziz, Flavell, Smith, G Eales (T Eales - substitute) and Graystone.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2018 were signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

Councillor Beardsworth addressed the Committee on agenda items 5 and 7c.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

Councillor Terrie Eales declared an interest as she works full time in recruitment in agenda item 5.

5. REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORTING AND MONITORING WORKING GROUP - GENERAL FUND MTFP 2019/2020 AND DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS

Councillor Beardsworth addressed the Committee commenting that she had asked the S151 Officer about the budget as there was little information available on the Internet. She was concerned about the proposed Council Tax increases from the Police and NCC; she conveyed concern about how some people would manage to pay this increase. She commented on Government funding cuts to Local Authorities. She urged the Committee to write to Central Government in this respect. Councillor Beardsworth added that she felt that austerity measures were having an impact, and they often had to make a choice between heating their home or food.

Councillor Beardsworth was thanked for her address.

The Chair advised that the O&S Working Group had met recently and considered the draft budget in detail and had proposed four items from the draft budget for the Committee to budget-scrutinise:

HRA Delivery Programme

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing advised that there is a 10 year plan for the HRA Delivery Programme through NPH; it is based on a minimum of 1,000 more homes in that period. NPH had commented that they could provide more than this target. NPH has submitted a bid to seek an increase in the cap, but the Government has now removed this cap. The Council is working to the original 10 year plan.

The Committee heard that Capita, independent verifiers, had undertaken verification of the 10-30 plan. NPH is due to complete 75 new homes this year then 150 further homes every year from 2020.

The Committee made comment, asked questions and heard:

- It was commented that the Committee was very pleased with this progress, it is step in the right direction.
- The Committee welcomed the new homes to be built.

- In response to a query regarding the types of houses to be built, it was reported that NPH and NBC have devised the pipeline and the bid specifies where and what type of housing, subject to planning.

Restructure of Housing Options and Advice Team

The Head of Housing and Wellbeing advised that he had not yet consulted with staff on the proposed restructure of Housing Options and Advice Team. The proposed growth is to enable expansion of Team, providing extra management capacity. It was added that it would expand homelessness prevention Team and create a single homeless pathway team, an additional 10 posts are proposed to be created. The Head of Housing and Wellbeing advised that every job description in the department had changed to ensure the service can perform as efficiently and effectively as possible.

The Committee made comment, asked questions and heard:

- Concerns were conveyed that this a specialised area of knowledge and expertise. It was realised that this is a big challenge. The Head of Housing and Wellbeing advised that he has spent a lot of time re-writing job descriptions. Good quality job descriptions raise performance by 25%. It is expected that the Authority can attract people who want a job that can make a difference to these Posts

Central Museum Development

The Head of Economy, Assets and Culture and the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Safety addressed the Committee. It was commented that a video of the development had been produced and this would be brought to a future meeting. Computer generated images would also be provided.

The Committee heard that the project had a budget of £6.7million, it was within budget and the Museum would open in March 2020. It would be completed this year but would then it would be internally refurbished.

The Chair advised that he had had sight of the plans, which were excellent.

Environmental Services Contract Review

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Head of Customer and Cultural Services, and the Environmental Services Contract Manager addressed the Committee.

A short presentation was given to the Committee. It was commented that the contract is positive but it was also recognised there are some challenges that would be addressed. It was an innovative contract. There is a need to be clear on the goals for example recycling has increased and fly-tipping reduced. In the second half of the year there has been a 10% drop in fly-tipping, recycling is also up 10%, and there will be a further increase following the roll out of wheelie bins.

The Committee made comment, asked questions and heard:

- It was queried whether the proposed reduction in bulky waste collection would have an effect. It was noted that this would have a cost implication of £2,500 per quarter. The Cabinet Member confirmed that it would have to be rolled out and the effect monitored.
- Previously a wait of 16 weeks for bulky waste had been usual and often waste had been fly tipped. The Cabinet Member advised that responsible businesses do not fly-tip. Officers are currently looking at the Council's Website to ascertain how bulky waste collection can be booked electronically.
- In response to a comment that the main refuse site is closed two days a week and this is perceived to increase fly tipping, the Cabinet Member advised that there is always a collection available 7 days a week but it might be in different locations of the borough; it would however be useful for there to be flexibility in the opening hours.
- The Committee supported the proposed reduction in bulky waste collection and suggested there is a need for enforcement action for fly-tipping. The Cabinet Member for Environment advised that there would be more enforcement action and that CCTV would not necessarily solve it. He informed the Committee of another Local Authority that had introduced a "mobile tip service" which had not been successful therefore the Authority would not be introduced that but is very open to suggestions.
- Regarding the collection of bulky waste, it would be asked what the waste comprised so that any health and safety implications could be dealt with.

Sacrificial Sacks

It is proposed that the trial would go from April 2019. There are 18,000 properties in the borough that do not have recycling bins. 900 homes in Far Cotton have been chosen to trial the sacks.

The Wardens work hard in Far Cotton regarding littering enforcement. Warden keen to catch people dropping litter incorrectly. It is proposed to be a one year trial. If successful, the trial will then move on to other areas. There are financial implication such as the need for a bag splitter should the trial be rolled out a cost of £100,000. If rolled out over the Borough conversations will take place regarding who will become responsible for this cost.

Food Waste

This proposal would bring in a saving of around £375,000 per year. The disposal of food waste needs to be communicated better to residents.

The Committee supported "caddy bags" and suggested large bags could be issued for the wheeled bins. The Cabinet Member confirmed this could be looked at for the future,

The Committee heard that the disposal of nappies was a huge issue and a lot of work had been undertaken in London regarding fabric nappies.

Review the public convenience provision

The Committee heard that it was proposed to close the public conveniences in St James to anti-social behaviour; this would generate a saving of £10,000 per annum.

Green Waste – charging

The Cabinet Member for Environment advised that it was proposed to charge for green waste collection as a future budget option. It was expected that this would generate an income of £700,000. A number of Councils in the county currently charge for this service. The charge is around £20 to £50 per year. It is an option for future consideration but not for 2019/2020.

Review enhanced tree maintenance service (Scrutiny Review)

Following on from a previous Scrutiny Review into tree maintenance, an enhanced service had been implemented that would generate a saving of £20,000 to £40,000 per year.

Community Involvement

The Committee heard that it was proposed that TV campaigns, especially Great British Spring Clean, would be utilised communities would be engaged regarding waste disposal and recycling. It was expected that any savings would be re-invested to further improve the service plus an increase the recycling credits.

The Committee made comment, asked questions and heard:

- The Warden is the central point of contact for the public, there is currently a record number of Wardens employed by the Council.
- There are various Forums and Groups and it work is being undertaken regarding the development of a Cleaner Northampton - a virtual forum.

Reduction in Shop Income

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Enterprise advised that a budget option that is being investigated is to offer tenants the opportunity to buy the shop unit that they are currently leasing. The Council would lose income from the rent but would receive a capital receipt from any sales. It would depend how many leaseholders took up this offer but an estimated figure of a maximum of £100,000 was suggested.

At this point, the Committee queried whether the Councillor Community Fund would continue for 2019/2020. Confirmation was provided that it would continue for next year.

The Chair thanked Officers and Cabinet Members for the work that they had undertaken on the draft budget. He confirmed that from the information provided the Committee was satisfied that its enquiries and queries regarding the draft budget had been answered and there was no further comment or question.

AGREED: That the Committee was content with the responses and information provided regarding the five issues.

6. CLEANLINESS OF THE TOWN CENTRE

The Cabinet Member for Environment and the Environmental Health and Licensing Manager went over action plan highlighting salient points.

The Committee made comment, asked questions and heard:

- The main environmental services contract had made a number of improvements. Enforcement has made a huge difference - enforcement is across the board.
- The Chair commented that previously leaves were an issue but not this year
- The Committee commented that there was a notable difference around certain parts of the town
- It was suggested that Community Warden could take on traffic warden responsibilities
- In response to a query regarding enforcement of cycling of pavements, the Cabinet Member for Environment commented that the Community Wardens do not have these powers but it is being investigated but they do speak to people informally.

AGREED: That monitoring is complete on “Keep Northampton Tidy”

7. MONITORING OF THE ACCEPTED RECOMMENDATIONS CONTAINED WITHIN OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORTS

(A) DEMENTIA FRIENDLY TOWN

The Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Safety and the Head of Customers and Culture ran over the Action Plan highlighting the salient points.

The Committee emphasised the need for Taxi and Private Hire Drivers to be trained on Dementia Friends.

AGREED: That further monitoring takes places at the April 2019 meeting of this Committee.

(B) HEALTHCHECK OF THE LOCAL ECONOMY

The Head of Economy, Assets and Culture and the Economic Development Consultant introduced the briefing note highlighting the salient points.

The Committee made comment, asked questions and heard:

In response to a query regarding the University, the Committee heard that Officers are in discussions with the University how links can be strengthened. There is a national profound skills shortage in most areas.

AGREED: The update is noted and that monitoring is complete.

(C) EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ENFORCEMENT OF TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE LICENSING

Councillor Sally Beardsworth addressed the Committee advising that she is a member of the Licensing Committee. She highlighted the importance of safeguarding and that CSE training is essential for taxi and private hire drivers. She commented on the need for more electric taxis. Councillor Beardsworth closed her address by advising that there is a need to ensure all drivers have good command of English language.

Councillor Beardsworth was thanked for her address.

The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager and Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Safety addressed the Committee. She ran over the action plan that detailed the implemented recommendations of the Committee's report on the effectiveness of the Enforcement of Taxi and Private Hire Licensing.

The Committee heard:

- CSE training is included in the induction training for all new drivers – rolling out a package for existing drivers.
- Electric vehicle charging point - A bid has been submitted, if successful - two chargers would be installed in surface car parks
- There are four electric hackneys operating in town.
- The Committee asked for awareness raising of drivers in respect of a dementia friendly town

The Chair advised that further monitoring was not required.

AGREED: That monitoring of the implementation of the accepted recommendations contained into the Action Plan is complete.

9. CABINET RESPONSE TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORTS

The Committee received Cabinet's responses to the following O&S Reports:

- Environmental Services
- Culture and Tourism
- Cemeteries

AGREED: That monitoring of the accepted recommendations contained in the above reports takes place at the April 2019 meeting of the Committee.

10. SCRUTINY PANELS

11. SCRUTINY PANEL 1

The update from the Chair of Scrutiny Panel 1 was noted.

12. SCRUTINY PANEL 2

The update from the Chair of Scrutiny Panel 2 was noted.

13. SCRUTINY PANEL 3

The update from the Chair of Scrutiny Panel 3 was noted.

(A) SCRUTINY PANEL 4

The update from the Chair of Scrutiny Panel 4 was noted.

14. EVALUATION OF O&S REPORTS WORKING GROUP

The update from the Chair of the Working Group was noted.

15. POTENTIAL FUTURE PRE DECISION SCRUTINY

There were none.

16. URGENT ITEMS

There were none.

At this point the Chair reminded the Committee of the date of the O&S Work Programme event.

The meeting concluded at 7:52 pm