

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 28 May 2012

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillor Les Marriott (Chair), Councillor Matthew Lynch(Deputy Chair), Councillors Tony Ansell, Michael Ford, Brendan Glynane, Elizabeth Gowen, Phil Larratt, Lee Mason, Nilesh Parekh, Suresh Patel, Brian Sargeant and Danielle Stone

Witnesses Councillor David Mackintosh- Leader of the Council -Item 5
Councillor Brandon Eldred- Cabinet Member for Community Engagement –Items 6 (a) (b) and (c)
Councillor Mary Markham- Cabinet Member for Housing -Item 8

Officers	David Kennedy	Chief Executive
	Julie Seddon	Director of Customers and Cultural Services
	Joe Biskupski	Community Engagement Manager
	Tracy Tiff	Overview and Scrutiny Officer
	Joanne Birkin	Democratic Services Officer

Press Willy Gilder

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence from the meeting was received from Councillor Jamie Lane.

Councillor Mike Hallam was no longer a member of the Committee; the Chair expressed his thanks to Councillor Hallam for his work on the Committee.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2012 were approved and signed by the Chair.

3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

Councillors Phil Larratt and Suresh Patel declared personal and non prejudicial interests as members of Northamptonshire County Council LGSS scrutiny committee in agenda item number 5.

5. SHARED SERVICES AND THE LGSS

The Leader and the Chief Executive gave the Committee a short introduction on the arrangements of the Local Government Shared Services (LGSS). The Committee considered a report concerning making arrangements for scrutinising the process of considering the Council's engagement as a partner in LGSS.

AGREED –1. That a Scrutiny Inquiry be established to take oversight of the LGSS process as it develops comprising: Councillor Les Marriott, (Chair) and Councillors Brendan Glynane, Jamie Lane, Phil Larratt and Danielle Stone.

6. MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACCEPTED RECOMMENDATIONS CONTAINED IN THE FOLLOWING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORTS

(A) NEIGHBOURHOOD MODEL

Councillor Brandon Eldred, Cabinet Member for Community Engagement provided an update on the implementation of the recommendations from the Neighbourhood Model Scrutiny review.

The main points of the discussion were as follows: -

- All of the key recommendations have been implemented.
- The only change was the operation of area meetings. There are still neighbourhood management team meetings but area meetings only take place with certain councillors as some members had felt that they were not effective.
- Parished areas have parish council liaison, which members may feel is more effective.
- Some members felt that the area meetings were an effective way of keeping in touch with what was happening in neighbouring wards. It was also felt that unless there were regular meetings it was more difficult to establish whether there was a continuing dynamic in solving issues.
- Committee asked if there was a mechanism to ensure that there was an effective procedure in place. The Committee asked whether it would be possible to have a report on the different arrangements and this was agreed.

AGREED: -That the Committee undertakes further monitoring of the accepted recommendations in six months.

(B) COMMISSIONING FRAMEWORK FOR THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

Councillor Brandon Eldred, Cabinet Member for Community Engagement provided an update on the implementation of the recommendations from the review of the commissioning framework for the voluntary and community sector.

Focus had been directed towards the grants process and this is working well, with another grant meeting scheduled soon. More progress needs to be made on the Commissioning framework.

AGREED: - That the Committee undertakes further monitoring of the accepted recommendations contained in the report in six months.

(C) COMMUNITY CENTRES

Councillor Brandon Eldred, Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, attended the Committee to provide an update on the implementation of the recommendations from the review of community centres.

The main points of discussion were as follows: -

- 15 community centres have now been transferred to local control.
- 2 more centres at Parklands and Weston Flavell are in the process of transferring.
- There have been some problems regarding heating at Weston Flavell, but this is being resolved and work is due to commence in August as agreed with the local management committee.
- All of those community centres that have been handed over have been operating effectively.
- Members asked if it would be possible to be provided with a list of services that the centres that have transferred out are providing. This would help to identify overall provision and if there are any key gaps that need to be covered.
- There was also concern that centres need to be financially viable in order to remain operational. There are regular meetings with Council officers to identify and resolve any concerns. It was also considered that effective commissioning links would give the centres more assistance with financial management.

AGREED: - That a further report on progress be made to Committee in six months time.

7. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY

The Chair agreed to delete this item as the Cabinet members were unable to attend. He confirmed that the Committee would receive the Performance Monitoring Report at its meeting on 25 July 2012 for consideration as to which measures it would like to scrutinise at its September meeting.

8. COUNCIL OWNED GARAGES REVIEW

Councillor Mary Markham, Cabinet member for Housing, gave the Committee an update on the progress of the review of the Council owned garages.

The main points of the discussion were as follows: -

- The Council has a stock of 3175 garages, of which 1850 are currently void.
- The size of the sites can vary from just 2 garages to over 50.
- The review of the garage sites was undertaken with each site being assessed in terms of three options for future use. These were:-
 - Land Disposal on the open market
 - Development site for re housing
 - Investment for repair.

Disposal on the open market was the preferred option.

- 5 sites were identified for disposal. One of these, at Northwood Road has recently been sold and another at Dryleys Court is for sale.

Development was the second choice

- 9 sites were identified as being potentially suitable for development as affordable housing sites and these are being considered for new build. The Council will negotiate any nomination rights on any sites sold to Housing Associations.
- The process of developing housing on these sites is a long one. One site identified in Springfields has had the numbers of properties that are to be built reduced after consultation with local residents. The potential new homes will have their own car parking provision and additional spaces on the site. This site proposal will now be proceeding through the planning process.

Investment

- If garage blocks show a medium to high demand and are in a fair state of repair then investment will be considered. The majority of sites in NBC ownership are in this category, a further review was undertaken to assess whether monies invested would be viable.
- Demand for garages fluctuates. Often people are only interested in garages in a very specific location.
- A recent project was undertaken on the Eastfields estate bringing all vacant garages back into a lettable condition. The work cost £15,000 and as a result 35 applicants were allocated a garage.
- Following the success of the Eastfield pilot then a budget allocation has been made in each of the three years and a programme of work developed that will deliver maximum impact for the monies available. Alongside each renovation will be a lettings campaign to encourage take up of the renovated garages.
- After the three-year investment campaign then the remaining sites will be reviewed.

General Points

- It is more difficult to come up with solutions if there are only a few garages in disrepair within a block.
- It was acknowledged that abandoned garages could prove a gathering point for young people, prompting fears over anti social behaviour.
- Renovated garages should not only generate income but also alleviate parking problems if properly used.
- Members asked whether garages could be used for storage of mobility scooters, but it is unlikely that people would be interested in this, as they need them to be very close to their home

. **AGREED.** That progress be monitored in a further six months.

9. SCRUTINY PANEL 3 (CUSTOMER SERVICES)

In the absence of the Chair of Scrutiny Panel 3, Councillor Mike Hallam, The Committee considered a report that set out the recommendations for Cabinet on Customer Services.

The main points of the discussion were as follows: -

- Concern was expressed that there wasn't a recommendation covering the problems experience by customers whose first language was not English. Translation services are available but it would be more helpful if there were more front line staff in the One Stop who were able to speak additional languages.
- It was agreed that an additional recommendation should be added to the report asking Cabinet to investigate the feasibility that the recruitment of front line staff should take the language needs of the local population into account. That recommendation to be: -
"That Equality and Multi-cultural Awareness continues to have a high priority for Induction and on going training of Customer Services Advisors, recognising the skills and knowledge required of Advisors dealing with a very diverse range of customers. "
- Members queried why the Leisure Trust had been singled out to undertake mystery shopping and not other leisure facilities such as the Delapre golf course. It was emphasised that there should only be monitoring of those services, which the Council was still responsible for delivering the outcomes and could directly influence.
- There was some discussion about how the introduction of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 would impact Customer Services. It was emphasised that it was because it was felt that the numbers of people needing assistance could increase considerably. It was suggested that the Cabinet Member be asked to attend an Overview and Scrutiny Committee after the Act had been introduced to give an update on its impact.

AGREED:

1. With the additional recommendation as detailed above, that the report be accepted by Overview and Scrutiny Committee and presented to Cabinet on 25 July 2012 for consideration.
2. That the Chair would provide a response to the recommendations contained within the report that are directed to Overview and Scrutiny at a future meeting.

10. SCRUTINY PANEL 1- SERIOUS ACQUISITIVE CRIME/COMMUNITY SAFETY.

The Committee considered the draft scope of the Review of Serious Acquisitive Crime/Community Safety.

Councillor Danielle Stone, Chairman of Scrutiny Panel 1, Serious Acquisitive Crime/Community Safety presented the scope of the review.

The main points of the discussion were as follows: -

- The Panel felt that its work should be expanded to include violent crime. Violent crime and the fear of violent crime is a serious issue to local residents and it was felt that it should be included. The title of the Panel should therefore be “Serious Acquisitive Crime and Violent Crime/Community Safety”.
- The Panel felt that the purpose of this Review should read: -
 - To investigate, as a benchmark, Northampton's crime statistics in relation to serious acquisitive and violent crime
 - To identify 'hotspots' in relation to serious acquisitive and violent crime
 - To identify the impact that serious acquisitive crime and violent crime has on the residents of Northampton
 - To identify the serious acquisitive crime and violent crime issues that Northampton Borough Council, in partnership with other Agencies, can have an impact upon.
- The Panel felt that there was a need for a representative of the night-time economy to be co opted to the Review. It was suggested that the Chair of PubWatch should be asked if he was willing to be co-opted to this Review for its life.
- The benchmarking exercise will prove useful in obtaining an understanding of underlying problems and it is hoped that the work will be of use to the local Police Commissioner when they are elected in November.
- It was noted that the Police Authority is also doing some work on violent crime and it was hoped to be able to feed that into the review.

AGREED: - That the scope of the Review be agreed.

11. SCRUTINY PANEL 2 (RETAIL EXPERIENCE)

The Committee considered the draft scope of the Review of the Retail Experience.

Councillor Matt Lynch Chairman of the Scrutiny Panel presented the scope of the review.

The Panel felt that the scope should be widened:-

- To investigate how NBC can support the town centre business community.

- To investigate how NBC can support local businesses throughout the development period of any major building projects in and close by to the town centre (i.e. Grosvenor; bus interchange; university accommodation etc).
- To identify and examine good practice from other boroughs
- To identify ways to develop greater involvement / engagement with local, regional and national businesses in public land improvement initiatives

The review would look into best practice elsewhere and would be making site visits to places of comparable size and demographic. They would also be looking at places that had undergone development projects to see how they had dealt with that.

AGREED: - That the scope of the Retail Experience review be approved.

12. SCRUTINY PANEL 3 (INFRASTRUCTURE AND S 106 AGREEMENTS)

The Committee was asked to elect a Chair for the Review and ask for initial membership.

All non executive members would also be asked if they wished to participate in the Review.

The Scrutiny Officer reported that Councillors Ifty Choudary and Terry Wire had expressed an interest in taking part in the review.

AGREED :-That membership of Scrutiny Panel 3 (Infrastructure and S10a Agreements) comprises:- Councillor Phil Larratt (Chair) Councillors Ifty Choudary, Elizabeth Gowen, Matt Lynch, Suresh Patel and Terry Wire.

13. FORWARD PLAN

The Chair of the Committee highlighted three items, which were due to be considered at Cabinet on 12th September 2012. These were: -

- Tenant Involvement Strategy
- Housing Allocations Scheme
- Tenancy Strategy 2012- 2013.

He considered that it would be useful to do some pre decision scrutiny at the Committee on 25 July 2012. One particular area of concern was the consultation process and how that would be managed.

It was also noted that the Cabinet scheduled in September was due to receive a report on the Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document. It was felt that this might have an impact on the work of the Section 106/infrastructure review. It was agreed that the Chair of the review Councillor Phil Larratt should discuss this with the Cabinet Member.

AGREED: That the Chair submit a request for the Committee to undertake pre decision Scrutiny on

- Tenant Involvement Strategy
- Housing Allocations Scheme
- Tenancy Strategy 2012- 2013.

14. URGENT ITEMS

There were none.

The meeting concluded at 7:45 pm