

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 17 September 2012

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

Witnesses Councillor Mary Markham- Cabinet Member for Housing -Items 5 and 6 (a)
Councillor Brandon Eldred- Cabinet Member for Community Engagement- Item 6 (a)
Councillor Tim Hadland- Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning Item 6 (d)

Officers Julie Seddon Director of Customers and Communities
Simon Dougall Head of Asset Management
Fran Rodgers Head of Strategic Housing
Tracy Tiff Scrutiny Officer
Joanne Birkin Democratic Services Officer

Members of the Public Primrose Landstowne

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Beverley Mennell.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held in 25 July 2012 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

Primrose Landstowne addressed the Committee on Item 5- Housing Consultations Feedback. She told the Committee that she had attended a consultation session at the Northampton People's Disability Forum. She was concerned that the needs of the long term disabled were not being best served by the proposals. She felt that it was unfair that those people in employment would receive a priority status when there were disabled people that would not be in a position to become employed.

She considered that the wide ranging consultation was very positive but felt that just having percentage responses was not useful. She accepted that changes needed to be made but emphasised that it was vital that the balance was right and urged Cabinet, when it came to make its' decision, to be mindful of all of the figures as there would be an impact to everyone and not just NBC Housing tenants.

The Chair thanked Primrose Landstowne for her address.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

There were none.

5. HOUSING CONSULTATIONS FEEDBACK

The Committee received an update on feedback on the various Housing Consultations from Councillor Mary Markham, Cabinet member with responsibility for Housing.

The main points of the discussion were as follows:-

Responses received now stand at:-

Sheltered Housing 936 from 2200
Allocations Policy 297
Tenancy Strategy 261

- The Allocations Policy and Tenancy Strategy consultation is due to run until the end of October 2012, and there will be a further campaign to try and obtain as many responses as possible. Tenancy Strategy and Housing Allocation Schemes will be submitted to the December 2012 meeting of Cabinet. Sheltered Housing will be going to the November meeting of Cabinet.
- Consultations have been directed at residents because a local response is wanted, although there has been liaison with many stakeholders which will include national organisations aware of best practice. There will be a national input but it will also be based around what is required by local people.
- There would still be an emphasis on the most vulnerable and a “points” system will still be operated. People working in the area may get additional points but there would still need to be a housing need before accommodation was offered.
- Members queried whether a key worker policy should be included in the allocations policy. There will be an implication that this would be the case as the worker priority would be that up to a certain income band.
- In the current circumstances, with waiting lists increasing at such a high rate other routes needed to be explored such as working with the national Landlords Association which would hopefully be able to offer accommodation to working people.
- Members also felt that there needed to be sustainability built into the policies, so that is was not just a matter of making the initial allocation but of also making sure that the residents were suited to the accommodation.

AGREED: That the Cabinet Member for Housing attend the next meeting of the Committee and provide a further update in order that the Committee can complete its pre decision scrutiny on the three draft Housing Policies:-

Sheltered Housing
Housing Allocations
Tenancy Strategy

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

(A) NEIGHBOURHOOD MODEL

Councillor Eldred, the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Community Engagement, and Julie Seddon, Director of Customers and Communities, attended the Committee meeting.

The Chair explained that the Neighbourhood Model Scrutiny Review had only been completed last year and that as the Authority was no longer employing Neighbourhood Co ordinators this would have a detrimental impact on the services provided. The Chair explained that he had had recent experience of trying to solve some problems and felt that that the Neighbourhood co ordinators played a vital part in that process. Neighbourhood wardens would still be employed; however Councillors expressed concern that they would not have had the correct experience and training.

Councillor Eldred commented that it was felt that Councillors could take on more of the Neighbourhood Co-ordinator role. Members of the Committee expressed concern at this, they accepted their roles as community leaders but felt that the Neighbourhood Co ordinators had provided an invaluable resource in helping them to resolve problems in their areas and that trying to combine both roles would prove difficult.

It was commented that as all Councillors, including Cabinet Members, are ward Councillors they too could expect an increase in workload. It was also felt that those Members whose wards were very large or which had very deep rooted problems would have additional pressures and that Councillors in full time work could be discriminated against because they cannot be as hands on as those not in full time work.

There was some discussion over whether Parish Councils, would fill the same role as the Neighbourhood Coordinators. Members felt that whilst Parish Councils fulfil a very useful role they cannot be seen as a substitute for the current Neighbourhood Model, particularly as not all areas of the Borough are covered by Parish Councils .

Members also felt that there is a difference in strategic and operational roles. Councillors are strategic, provide leadership, they are not operational.

There were also concerns expressed that there were insufficient park rangers and Members were advised that there would an additional full time and an additional part time ranger appointed.

Members felt that the Neighbourhood Co ordinators had been an important resource for them and were very disappointed that they had been removed without consultation with the ward Members.

AGREED that a further update be provided by the Cabinet Member in six month's time .

(B) ROUGH SLEEPERS

Councillor Markham, Cabinet member with responsibility for Housing, and Fran Rodgers, Head of Strategic Housing, addressed the Committee concerning progress on developing services for Rough Sleepers.

The key improvement had been the development of the Oasis House, which has provided support and accommodation for 48 customers. This has proved very successful and is always full.

The Council had also been successful in obtaining funding from the Department of Communities and Local Government to launch the No Second Night Out initiative to eradicate rough sleeping. Through this initiative then anyone who ends up on the street should get rapid help so that they don't need to spend a second night out, and can quickly access a place of safety.

As at 4th September there were 4 people sleeping rough and work was being undertaken with various partners to prevent these people from continuing to sleep on the streets.

Members asked whether the people who were sleeping rough were actually people from Northampton. Some are of Eastern European origin who have either come to the area without a job or lost their job and do not qualify to receive benefits. There are a couple of properties that can be used as a stop gap. However if they have no connection with the area, they will be encouraged to return to places to which they have a connection.

It was pointed out that the Overview and Scrutiny Rough Sleepers Review had revealed that the sleepers did not necessarily sleep in the town centre but were more likely to be found in places such as the Railway bridges etc. more on the outskirts of town.

There were also some people who were sleeping rough as a lifestyle choice and there had been cases of people who had been found accommodation but who preferred to sleep rough. Recently Councillors had been sent the emergency contact number for obtaining assistance for rough sleepers.

All of the actions from the Overview and Scrutiny Review have been completed and no further monitoring action is required.

AGREED: That the report be noted.

(C) INTERIM MONITORING OF THE COUNCILLOR EMPOWERMENT FUND

The Committee was given an update on the progress of the Councillor Empowerment Fund.

The Committee commented that the process of making payments seemed to be going well but that there could be better co-ordination and feedback so that members were aware when the payments had been made.

The Committee was advised that due to the departure of the Neighbourhood Co-ordinators, requests would now be processed by the Community Engagement Manager, under the Head of Partnership Support, and that the forms and the page on the website were being updated to reflect those changes.

Members were also assured that, in accordance with the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review, that a list of all the monies which had been awarded under the scheme would be published.

Members felt that it was important that some form of equalities monitoring was done in order to try and establish that the money was being awarded on a fair basis of need. If Councillors are unaware of which other Members had been approached for funding then some organisations could be receiving a disproportionate amount of money.

AGREED:- That a further update report be received after the Scheme had been in operation for 12 months.

(D) LEASE BETWEEN NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL, NORTHAMPTON TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB AND NORTHAMPTON ATHLETICS CLUB

Councillor Hadland, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning and Simon Dougall, Asset Manager gave the Committee an update on the implementation of the recommendations of the Review on the Lease between Northampton Borough Council, Northampton Town Football Club and Northampton Athletics Club as agreed by Cabinet in May 2011.

The Committee was informed that the relationships between the Athletics Club and the Football Club were much improved.

It is generally accepted that the development of the area would require the Athletics Club to move and negotiations on that were on going.

AGREED:- That a further update report be received in six months' time.

7. PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Committee considered the Performance Monitoring highlight report for June 2012.

The Chair commented that just because some of the items were shown as red it did not mean that the item was performing badly, as was demonstrated in the item on the

determination of planning applications which has a target of 74% but had been performing at more than 90%.

Councillor Jamie Lane referred to indicator TC005- the percentage increase in Town Centre footfall compared to previous year. He queried the location of the sensors for measuring the footfall and also wanted to know if there was a co relation between car parking figures and footfall in the Town Centre. He will raise this with the relevant Cabinet member and advise Committee of the outcome.

Members also queried whether it would be possible to include a graphical presentation and whether it was possible to know what percentage of the entire plan had reached required levels

8. SCRUTINY PANELS

(A) SCRUTINY PANEL 1 - SERIOUS ACQUISITIVE CRIME AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

The Committee noted the report on the progress of the Serious Acquisitive Crime and Community Safety Review.

(B) SCRUTINY PANEL 2- RETAIL EXPERIENCE.

The Committee noted the report on the progress of the Retail Experience Review.

(C) SCRUTINY PANEL 3- INFRASTRUCTURE REQUIREMENTS AND SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS

The Committee noted the report on the progress of the Infrastructure Requirements and Section 106 Agreements.

9. LOCAL GOVERNMENT SHARED SERVICES (LGSS) SCRUTINY INQUIRY

The Chair commented that there had been two meetings with initial information. However further meetings due for September had been cancelled as more detailed information was not yet available.

AGREED:- The Terms of Reference for the LGSS Scrutiny Inquiry be approved as detailed in paragraph 3.2 of the report.

10. REPORT BACK FROM NBC'S REPRESENTATIVE TO NCC'S HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Danielle Stone attended the meeting of the NCC's County Health and Social Care Committee held in September 2012.

The main points of the meeting were:-

There had been a presentation from Corby Commissioning Group, which was a small commissioning group operating very much on a local basis. They had been developing a scheme of providing local beds for convalescence which had led to better customer satisfaction and higher efficiency savings.

There was also an update from the Chair of NCC Commissioning services who emphasised that the shared commissioning of services was both intended to provide efficiency savings and to improve services.

Councillor Stone urged members of the Committee to attend future meetings as they were public meetings dealing with important and interesting matters.

AGREED: that the update be noted.

11. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TRAINING CHAMPION

Councillor Elizabeth Gowen, the Overview and Scrutiny Training Champion, gave the Committee an update on the progress of the Overview and Scrutiny training programme.

The training programme is in year 2 of a 4 year programme.

Development Sessions due for this year included:-

- Chairing Skills
- Introduction to Overview and Scrutiny
- Evidence and Questioning Skills

However, it was felt that as Councillors had attended the sessions on the introduction to Overview and Scrutiny and chairing skills in the summer of 2011, there is not the need to re run these sessions. It is acknowledged that the Committee has gained experience in evidence and questioning skills and it is suggested that there is not the need to hold a session on this topic either.

A Councillor development on presentation skills has been scheduled for 9th January 2013. There will be two sessions provided by an external facilitator at two different times. Members would need to decide which session they would be attending.

AGREED:

- 1 That the update be noted.
- 2 That the Committee informs the [Councillor Connect Team](#) which of the two sessions of Presentation Skills Councillors will attend on 9th January 2013.
- 3 That Overview and Scrutiny development sessions on the introduction to Overview and Scrutiny, Chairing Skills and evidence and questioning skills are not scheduled for year 2 of the Overview and Scrutiny training programme.

12. FORWARD PLAN

The Committee agreed to receive further updates on the Housing Consultations but did not identify any further items for pre decision scrutiny.

13. URGENT ITEMS

There were none.

The meeting concluded at 8:00 pm