

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 12 November 2012

PRESENT: Councillor Les Marriott (Chair), Councillor Matt Lynch (Vice Chair)
Councillors Tony Ansell, Michael Ford, Elizabeth Gowen,
Jamie Lane, Phil Larratt, Lee Mason, Brian Sargeant
and Danielle Stone

WITNESS: Councillor Mary Markham- Cabinet Member for Housing -Items 5
and 6 (a)

OFFICERS:	Catherine Wilson	Head of Business Change
	Fran Rodgers	Head of Strategic Housing
	Tracy Tiff	Scrutiny Officer
	Joanne Birkin	Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence from the meeting was received from Councillor Suresh Patel.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on the 17th and 24th September 2012 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

Councillor Larratt declared an interest in Item 11 LGSS Scrutiny Inquiry as a member of the County Council LGSS Committee. He left the room and took no part in the discussion thereon.

5. PRE DECISION SCRUTINY ON THE: HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME, TENANCY STRATEGY 2012-13, SHELTERED HOUSING

Councillor Mary Markham, Cabinet Member for Housing, and Fran Rodgers Head of Strategic Housing, attended the meeting to give the Committee an update on Housing consultations.

Sheltered Housing Consultation

Councillor Markham advised the Committee that the Sheltered Housing Proposals would be considered by Cabinet on 14th November. She emphasised that the proposals were in relation to the support provision and not the actual accommodation.

All Councillors have had an opportunity to take part in awareness sessions and this is the third time that the item had been discussed at Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The main points of discussion were as follows:-

- There had been a very good response rate.
- Results were very much as expected with most respondents feeling that the current support system was very rigid and most customers without support needs felt that they should be able to contact staff as and when needed.
- There was strong support for the sheltered housing staff and the lifeline system.

Members supported the intention to provide a more efficient and flexible service. They queried whether new technology could be used more widely. It was agreed that some residents could be contacted by E mail or text, but that would not be the starting point, but may be more widely used as the technology capabilities of people who are using the sheltered housing change.

Members were pleased to see the high level of respondents, but had concerns about what would happen after funding is changed in September 2013.

Councillor Markham expressed her thanks to all the officers who had been involved in the awareness sessions, everyone had worked very hard to make sure that as many people as possible were aware of the proposed changes.

The Chair confirmed that he would be addressing the Cabinet on 14th November to explain how the scrutiny process had been involved.

Tenancy Strategy

Under the Localism Act there is now a duty for Local Authorities to consider and revise how they wish to run their housing tenancies.

There have been a series of awareness sessions, workshops and surgeries. A reasonable number of responses have been received, of those responses there was an overwhelming majority in favour of the proposed changes. It was generally felt that with the exception of older people then tenancy for life was not appropriate, although if there were no changes in circumstances then the tenancy could be renewed on a five year basis. There was some debate around the financial thresholds that would be applied, whilst there was some agreement that it was not appropriate for people on high incomes to access social housing then the proposed capping levels were not seen as very high.

There was also concern expressed that if people were referred to private landlords most of their tenancies were of a very short term nature, only six months or a year which made it difficult for people to settle and feel secure in a property. There is work on going with landlords trying to encourage longer tenancies of say 2 years but it is still likely that a tenant would have to undergo an introductory tenancy period before longer periods would be offered. There were also discussions about key workers. The

new scheme affords priority to those in work but who cannot afford to meet their needs without some support therefore there is no longer a need to have a separate policy for key workers.

Some Members also felt that many tenants were still unaware of the impact of the Welfare Reform Act would have particularly in relation to tenants on benefit who are occupying what may in future be seen as a property which is larger than they require. There have been several information sessions and new tenancies are being allocated with the forthcoming regulations in mind.

AGREED:

1. That the information on the Key Worker Policy be circulated to the Committee.
2. Details regarding the financial thresholds of the new allocations scheme be circulated to the Committee.

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

(A) SHELTERED HOUSING AND HOUSING OPTIONS FOR OLDER PEOPLE.

Councillor Markham, Cabinet Member for Housing, and Fran Rodgers, Head of Strategic Housing attended the Committee to advise on the implementation of the recommendations of the Scrutiny Report: Sheltered Housing and Housing Options for Older People Review.

It was commented that many of the recommendations have been incorporated in the Sheltered Housing Review report which would be considered by Cabinet on 14th November. In particular it recognised the need to respond to an aging population who had ever increasingly complex needs.

Key points would be the need to work with other agencies and partners.

The review had shown that the lifeline call system was highly valued and could be better utilised. There were discussions on going with healthcare professionals on how technology could be utilised.

Tenancy Agreements have been changed to alleviate problems with mobility scooters.

There was also work on going as a result of the Decent Homes survey, which may impact on some schemes which may be reclassified. If there are updates or alterations to scheme classification then all Councillors will be made aware.

AGREED: That monitoring on the implementation of the accepted recommendations contained in the Scrutiny Review Report: Sheltered Housing and Housing Options for Older People is complete.

7. PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Committee commented that there were several items that appeared to be over performing. This could lead to questioning whether performance targets were being set at correct levels.

There was some concern over the varying percentages, for example the collection of housing rents which members found confusing. There did not appear to be consistent profiling of whether items were on track or not. It was explained that the percentage expected was not linear but depended on the number of days in a month and the amounts outstanding. It was possible to have a percentage of over 100% which was still not achieving targets.

It was also noted that the serious acquisitive crime figures have increased and this was drawn to the attention of the Chair of the Scrutiny Panel 1. It was noted that Audit Committee had asked for a further report on this matter. The Chair suggested that Scrutiny Panel 1- Serious Acquisitive Crime, Violent Crime and Community Safety, is asked to obtain details on these figures at a future meeting.

The Chair asked that further information on PI – H12- Rent collection be circulated to the Committee.

Members felt that performance figures were very important data that needed to be available to all members and asked how they would be able to query data. It was stated that data may be put into the system by a number of different officers and that queries could be made via the Call centre who would be able to identify the relevant officer.

It was felt that it might be more useful if the Committee only considered those items that were “exceptions” rather than all of the performance measures.

The Chair also queried whether there should be some consideration given to the level of resourcing if items were over performing on a regular basis.

AGREED:

1. That further information on PI – H12- Rent collection be circulated to the Committee.
2. The Chair suggested that Scrutiny Panel 1- Serious Acquisitive Crime, Violent Crime and Community Safety, be asked to obtain details on these figures at a future meeting.

8. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY - ABSENCE MANAGEMENT DATA

Catherine Wilson, Head of Business Change, attended the Committee to provide an update on absence management performance.

The main points of discussion were as follows:-

It was noted that Audit Committee had also considered the absence reporting data. The target outturn figure was 10 days average absence per employee. The current high level of sickness absence means that this would not be achieved without major changes in approach.

Overview and Scrutiny had reported on its Review absence monitoring in March 2011 and Cabinet accepted their recommendations. Monitoring of the recommendations took place on 25th July 2012 and it was reported that all recommendations had been implemented.

Benchmarking with other local authorities showed that the Council had the highest level of long term sickness absences and the lowest short term.

Sickness is also monitored by type. Current priorities are stress and mental health and additional and when an employee returns after those types of absence there are additional aspects of the return to work interview which includes a stress risk indicator.

A new absence management process has been introduced, and a policies and approach to absence reviews to encourage employees to attend work, return to work as soon as they can after a period of sick level by identifying ways of helping them. Absences from work will also form part on assessments for performance progression.

It was noted that Audit Committee had received a report detailing these statistics and asked for a further report in three months' time. It was agreed that the same report would be considered by Committee.

Members asked whether the Local Government Shared Services had caused additional stress, but it was stated that no co relation had been seen.

AGREED: Further data on absence management monitoring be reported to the Committee at three month intervals.

9. SCRUTINY PANELS

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

The Committee noted the report on the progress of the Serious Acquisitive Crime, Violent 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 Review.

10. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORTING AND MONITORING WORKING GROUP

The Committee received a report detailing the Terms of Reference for the 2012/13 Overview and Scrutiny Reporting and Monitoring Working Group.

AGREED The Terms of Reference of the Reporting and Monitoring Working Group be approved.

11. LGSS SCRUTINY INQUIRY

Councillor Marriott, as Chair of the Local Government Shared Services (LGSS) scrutiny Inquiry advised the Committee on the work of the Inquiry.

He stated that the Inquiry had met twice to agree terms of reference and then at their latest meeting on 31st October the Inquiry had:-

- reviewed progress against the agreed terms of reference
- reviewed the updated risk log
- received the outline business case for a range of NBC services joining the LGSS shared service.

In between times several meetings had been cancelled as there had not been any information available. The Chair had received a briefing only after the decision in principle had been taken, and he did not feel that the Inquiry had actually fulfilled the role that he had anticipated and there was a need to review its terms of reference.

The LGSS will not provide sufficient savings to close the budget gap; although it would make a significant contribution. Savings were mapped over a five year period.

He emphasised that he did want to ensure that Scrutiny had made an input into how the LGSS would work. The Inquiry would continue and would now review:

- That robust governance arrangements are in place for the next stage of the process.
- That the transition plan is robust, deliverable and resourced.
- That the final agreement still provides value for money should there be any changes to the financial aspects from the outline business case.
- That the final agreement is robust and addresses all areas which would be expected in an agreement such as this including:
 - Pricing & Payments
 - Share of future income
 - Mitigation with regards to future costs
 - SLA's / Performance indicators
 - Robust monitoring arrangements and preventative and corrective action protocols

- Treatment of NBC Assets
- Future investment requirements (e.g. replacement)
- Business continuity / disaster recovery

AGREED:

1. The Terms of Reference for the LGSS etc be approved to read:

- That robust governance arrangements are in place for the next stage of the process.
- That the transition plan is robust, deliverable and resourced.
- That the final agreement still provides value for money should there be any changes to the financial aspects from the outline business case.
- That the final agreement is robust and addresses all areas which would be expected in an agreement such as this including:
 - Pricing & Payments
 - Share of future income
 - Mitigation with regards to future costs
 - SLA's / Performance indicators
 - Robust monitoring arrangements and preventative and corrective action protocols
 - Treatment of NBC Assets
 - Future investment requirements (e.g. replacement)
 - Business continuity / disaster recovery

2. That outstanding Scope Issues are resolved.

12. 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.

AGREED: that the update be noted.

13. POTENTIAL FUTURE PRE DECISION SCRUTINY

The Chair reminded members of the Committee that the Forward Plan was no longer published. Instead all members would receive E mails listing items to be considered by Cabinet. He advised the Committee to contact him or the Scrutiny Officer with any suggestions for pre decision scrutiny.

The meeting concluded at 8:00 pm