

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 9 September 2013

PRESENT: Councillor Jamie Lane (Chair); Councillor Brian Sargeant (Deputy Chair); Councillors Tony Ansell, Mick Ford, Brendan Glynane, Elizabeth Gowen, Phil Larratt, Matt Lynch, Lee Mason, Nilesh Parekh, Suresh Patel, Sivaramen Subbarayan and Winston Strachan

Councillor Brandon Eldred, Cabinet Member - Community Engagement
Councillor Mike Hallam, Cabinet Member - Environment
Councillor Tim Hadland, Cabinet Member – Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning
Councillor Mary Markham, Cabinet Member – Housing
Julie Seddon - Director of Customers and Communities
Tracy Tiff – Scrutiny Officer
Nicola Brindley – Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor David Mackintosh.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 25th July were signed by the Chair as a true record.

3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

There were none.

5. MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACCEPTED RECOMMENDATIONS CONTAINED IN THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORT

5.A HATE CRIME REPORTING MECHANISMS

Julie Seddon, Director of Customers and Communities, addressed the Committee and confirmed that there had been good progress of the implementation of the recommendations by Cabinet. The hate crime documentation had been produced and adapted by Councillors and Police and there had been increased awareness of the need to report it.

There would be training for Councillors in March 2014 and training for staff which would be included in the induction process for new staff. There would be a single point of contact which would be reviewed and updated if there was any staff structure change. Housing staff wardens would receive more intensive training

There had been an increase of the number of hate crimes reported by staff but regarded this as a positive increase as there had been an improvement in the awareness and understanding. This was directly related to the work carried out by Overview and Scrutiny.

Councillor Jamie Lane agreed that all of the Councillors should attend and would forward

the date of the training once it had been arranged.

Resolved: That the update be noted.

6. RESPONSE OF CABINET TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORT: RETAIL EXPERIENCE

Councillor Tim Hadland addressed the Committee and confirmed that the Cabinet report in July for the Town Centre programme had been comprehensive and invaluable. The Overview and Scrutiny report had produced 28 recommendations which were being incorporated which had included:-

- The upgrade of parking machines to pay by debit or credit cards
- August free parking which had been a success
- NBC Licensing department to show their presence in the town centre
- Designated spots on Abington Street for buskers

There had been a suggestion that there was a map available to street drinkers which located the areas of different degrees of tolerance of where the street drinkers could go. Julie Seddon confirmed that this would be investigated further.

Resolved:- That the report be noted.

7. MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACCEPTED RECOMMENDATIONS CONTAINED IN THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORT

7.A CUSTOMER SERVICES

Councillor Brandon Eldred confirmed that there had been an increase in the number of phone calls to the Contact Centre due to the Welfare Reform Act and had put extra staff and measures in place to cope with the demand.

He advised that the Contact Centre had been doing an excellent job and urged Councillors to contact them via email instead of calling to free up staff for the residents who were their priority. The email address is contactnbc@northampton.co.uk.

Resolved: That the update be noted.

8. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY

Councillor Tim Hadland presented the report to the Committee on the following performance measure:-

Town Centre Footfall

The new bus interchange would lead to changes in the town centre and a camera had already been installed in the Drapery to monitor before and after. It monitors the Town Centre over a 24 hour period.

Councillor Mike Hallam presented the briefing note to the Committee on the following performance measures:-

Missed Bins

In June there had been changes to the routes and rounds of the collections. They had been running at 85% efficiency in July and awaited August and Septembers figures to see if this

had improved.

Compost

Ways to increase recycling rates were being reviewed and was a challenging process. They were going to liaise with schools to educate children to encourage their parents to recycle. There was an on-going problem with HIMO and student properties that had sacks and therefore, unable to identify the owner if it was not collected and encouraged fly tipping.

Julie Seddon, Chair, CSP, presented the briefing note to the Committee on the following performance measure:-

Overall crime figures

There had been a significant decrease in crime as key offenders had been taken out of circulation.

Councillor Brandon Eldred presented the briefing note to the Committee on the following performance measure:-

Contact Centre calls

The Contact Centre received 31,000 calls per month and 200,000 emails and provided a great service to the public. This had been a 12% increase on last year.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

9. PROGRESS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TENANTS' ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Councillor Mary Markham presented the report to the Committee and confirmed that there had been a good response to it. Twelve meetings had taken place since July and initial training would be given to Chairs and Vice Chairs on 16th September and would be open to all tenants in November.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

10. WELFARE REFORM AND THE IMPACT ON RENT INCOME COLLECTION

Councillor Mary Markham reported that there had been an increase in the rent arrears due to the Welfare Reform and had spent the last 12 months liaising with tenants to downsize. 450 people had still not registered to move. They had employed two more officers in rent collections and two more officers to help people with the exchange. The rising figures were a concern.

In a response to questions from Members, Councillor Mary Markham confirmed that people needed to actively look for suitable homes and sometimes in the private rental sector as there was not enough local government housing stock. They had identified their own tenants who would have their benefits capped and had not relied on the DWP.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

11. SCRUTINY PANELS

11.A SCRUTINY PANEL 1 - IMPROVING THE TOWN'S PARKS

Councillor Elizabeth Gowen confirmed that they had received positive feedback from the site

visits and still had two more meetings to come.

Resolved: That the update be noted.

11.B SCRUTINY PANEL 2 - MANAGEMENT AND REGULATION OF PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING (INCLUDING HIMOS)

The report was presented to the Committee.

Resolved: That the update is noted.

Councillor Jamie Lane thanked Councillors for chairing Scrutiny Panels.

12. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY EXCELLENCE PLAN 2013-2015

Councillor Jamie Lane confirmed that this report was what the Committee hoped to achieve over the next few months and years. Our website had been successful and he felt that we were one of the Leaders in Overview and Scrutiny.

Resolved: That the Overview and Scrutiny Excellence Plan 2013-2015 is approved.

13. REPORT BACK FROM NBC'S REPRESENTATIVE TO NCC'S HEALTH, ADULT CARE AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Matt Lynch provided an update on the Health, Adult Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee and confirmed he was looking forward to the next meeting and how it was going to progress.

Councillor Brendan Glynane confirmed that the Podiatry service was now only going to have one consultant and was going to be monitored closely by Northamptonshire County Council. Concerns had been raised for Northampton and Kettering General Hospitals over the winter months with inflation and no new investments and would be discussed at future Scrutiny meetings.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

14. POTENTIAL FUTURE PRE DECISION SCRUTINY

Cabinet attending Overview and Scrutiny

Councillor Jamie Lane confirmed that Cabinet attended the Overview and Scrutiny meeting every six months and they would be attending the next meeting.

It was decided that this Item should remain on the agenda should any new issues arise that needed to be investigated.

Housing Strategy

Councillor Lee Mason confirmed that there were over 200 people on the waiting list to downsize their properties and they were looking at building affordable homes.

It was suggested that existing housing stock be reviewed to be extended or have loft conversions and increase capacity within existing stock.

15. URGENT ITEMS

Paperless Committees

After general discussion it was decided that only the front sheet agendas would be made available at the meetings and all of the reports electronic as there had been considerable savings made by not printing off the agenda packs.

The meeting concluded 19:50 hrs.