

Report of the  
**Overview & Scrutiny**  
Committee

Annual Report  
2013/2014

## **A Message from Councillor Jamie Lane Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

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This Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee Annual Report gives a summary of the Committee's activities over the past twelve months and maps out its plans for the forthcoming year.

It has been another busy year for O&S with three comprehensive reviews being undertaken:

- Improving the Town's Parks
- Management and Regulation of Private Sector Housing (Including HIMO's)
- Impact of the Welfare Reform Act

One of the reviews benefitted from the assistance of four co-opted members, their knowledge and experience assisted the Scrutiny Panel in arriving at its conclusions and recommendations. Two of the reviews are due to complete their work in the spring and summer 2014. They will present their findings to Cabinet early in the Municipal year 2014/2015.

A number of the suggestions put forward by the public influenced the O&S Work Programme for 2013/2014. I was delighted that over thirty suggestions for future scrutiny review were received this year. Councillors carefully considered the suggestions at a workshop held in March 2014.

The Committee scrutinised the Council's budget proposals by delegating work to its Reporting and Monitoring Working Group who identified three budget proposals for the Committee to scrutinise in-depth.

The Committee has developed good working practices, procedures and protocols; a number of which have been used by other Local Authorities keen to reproduce our working practices.

I am pleased to highlight that Overview and Scrutiny continues to become involved with decisions at an early stage, for example, scrutiny provided its input into the Nene Meadows Supplementary Planning Document.

I would like to thank all those involved in Overview and Scrutiny over the past year. The support of all those involved in reviews is required for a successful outcome.

I do hope that you find this report informative and interesting.



**Councillor Jamie Lane**  
Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee



## Overview and Scrutiny Committee Achievements

### How was this impact made during 2013-2014?

The Scrutiny Panels carry out in-depth Scrutiny reviews, whilst the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee concentrates on strategic issues, including holding the Cabinet to account, performance management and scrutiny of crime and disorder. This structure attracts increased public participation and the involvement of non-Executives in Scrutiny reviews.

#### Key Example:

#### Involvement of Non- Executives (not Scrutiny Members) in Overview and Scrutiny

The O&S structure enables non-Executives, who are not members of the O&S Committee, to be fully involved in the O&S process.

#### Key Example:

The Scrutiny Panel that looked at the town's parks was made up of eight non-Executives, of which four were not O&S Councillors, demonstrating complete involvement of non-Executives in the O&S process.

#### Crime and Disorder Scrutiny

**Key Example:** Crime and Disorder Scrutiny is an example of excellent working relationships between non-Executives and partners.

In 2010 the scrutiny of crime and disorder was formalised, putting in place clear working arrangements between the Chair of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and the Committee. A bi-annual report from the CSP continues to inform the O&S Committee of work undertaken, and non-Executives decide if further review or scrutiny is required. This report focuses on the levels of performance and whether crime has increased in the light

of reduced resources, if so what measures have been taken to meet any shortfall in performance.

*“Community Safety continues to work closely with Overview & Scrutiny, feeding into their reviews, as and when required. The recommendations and support provided through these reviews continues to add value to the work undertaken by the Community Safety team”*

**Debbie Ferguson,**  
Community Safety Partnership Manager

#### Performance Management Scrutiny

A new process enabling the Committee to identify key performance measures earlier on was introduced in 2013/14. The Committee informs the Chair prior to a meeting of the O&S Committee of performance measures that it feels warrant future scrutiny.

The scrutiny of specifically identified measures is included on the agenda of meetings of the O&S Committee. This results in measures being reviewed on an exception basis with relevant Cabinet Members being called to present information to the Committee. Cabinet Members are scrutinised on performance, the causes of underperformance and the corrective actions being taken. Active debate is undertaken and support and challenge is offered to the recommendations being made to deliver service improvements.

#### Key Example:

Performance management scrutiny of:-

- ESC02 missed bins corrected within 24 hours of notification
- ESC04 household waste recycled and composted
- ESC07 Land and highways assessed falling below acceptable levels - graffiti



## Critical Friend to Cabinet

### Robust Pre-Decision Scrutiny

The O&S structure enables regular, robust pre-decision scrutiny. One in-depth pre-decision scrutiny activity was undertaken this year.

**Key example:** Scrutiny input into the Nene Meadows Planning Supplementary document.

The O&S Committee considered the Nene Meadows Planning Supplementary document, at a specially convened meeting on 10 February 2014, in order that its comments could be considered prior to the report being above by Cabinet.

Information obtained from the followings sources formed the main body of evidence gathered by the Committee:

- Comprehensive presentation detailing the Nene Meadows Supplementary Planning document
- Planning Policy Team Leader
- Planning Policy and Conservation Manager

This pre-decision scrutiny activity demonstrates non-Executives providing input into the decision making at an early stage.

### Call-In

At Northampton call-in is used sparingly. During 2013/2014 there was one call-in hearing which demonstrates that the decision making process is transparent and open to challenge.

### Influencing Policy Development

Three in-depth Scrutiny reviews were undertaken during 2013/2014. The final reports of two of these will be presented to Cabinet early in the Municipal year 2014/2015.

Review work of 2012/2013 has received Cabinet's response. 100% of the recommendations were accepted, which highlights that Overview and Scrutiny is continuing to make significant influence of Council policy, both in terms of holding the Cabinet to account and contributing to policy development, and the well-being of the citizens of Northampton.

### Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) Good Scrutiny Awards 2013

Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton was shortlisted for an award as part of the Centre for Public Scrutiny's (CfPS) Good Scrutiny Awards 2013 under the category transforming services for its review - Managing Community Centres.

#### The judges said:

*"this work, which facilitated the transfer of a large number of community facilities from council to community control, demonstrated the contribution that scrutiny can make to implementing a key government policy around community asset transfer successfully at local level."*

A short video about this review was shown at the Awards Ceremony.





Overview and Scrutiny

Excellence Action Plan 2013-2015

TT Excellence Plan Version 1 9 September 2013 1

## Overview and Scrutiny Excellence Plan (2013-2015)

An evaluation of the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) function at Northampton was carried out in 2012 using the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS)'s framework "Accountability Works for You".

As a result of the evaluation, an Excellence Plan for O&S was produced and published. This document highlights a number of the processes and procedures that O&S at Northampton follows.

- The Overview and Scrutiny Excellence Plan (2013-2015) is used to:
- Encourage involvement in the process of those being scrutinised
- Communicate the potential of Scrutiny to local communities
- Build confidence of those undertaking Scrutiny activities

The Excellence Plan has attracted interest and compliments from various external Scrutiny peers.

## Raising the profile of Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton

The profile of O&S has continued to be raised with a number of important and successful reviews carried out during 2013/2014. O&S is keen to keep this up and invites suggestions for the work programme from various partners, agencies and members of the public.

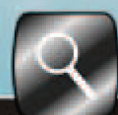
The Scrutiny review process at Northampton is widely recognised both within the Council and amongst the citizens of Northampton. The O&S Work Programme received extensive press coverage, locally, which twenty six individuals responded to, suggesting over thirty ideas for future Scrutiny review.

## Paperless Innovation

The purpose of the innovation was to implement paperless Committees, using O&S as a pilot. Advancement of technology provides a real opportunity to protect the environment by utilising ICT to its full capacity and reducing the quantity of printed material.

The paperless innovation created benefits such as financial savings; highlighted the Council as modern, forward thinking and being environmentally responsible.

The pilot operated successfully and the O&S Committee and its three Scrutiny Panels agreed to continue to operate paperless.



As reported in last year's annual report, the innovation attracted national interest. External Interest in the innovation has continued this year, with a number of enquiries regarding the success of the innovation.

### Public engagement within the Overview and Scrutiny process at Northampton

O&S has included various issues referred to it from the public onto its Work Programmes. The details below provide key points of how O&S work has reflected the concerns of service users.



### Key Example of review work: Improving the Town's Parks

The purpose of the review was to improve community engagement within the town's parks.

Following approval of its work programme for 2013/2014, the O&S Committee agreed to include a review of the town's parks in its

work for 2013/2014. The O&S Committee commissioned Scrutiny Panel 1 to undertake the review. A short, sharp review commenced in June 2013, concluding in November 2013.

A Scrutiny Panel was established comprising eight Councillors and four co-opted members, who represented various Friends of Parks Groups.

This review attracted thirteen public attendees over various meetings of the Scrutiny Panel, a number of which addressed a meeting.

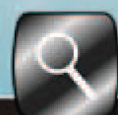
Recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel were around the themes:

- Communications
- Observations – the town's parks
- Key facilities in the town's parks
- Additional facilities in the town's parks
- Role of Park Management Committees
- Membership of Park Management Committees

*A short sharp review took place between June and November 2013. A series of interviews with a number of expert advisors were held and a variety of community groups and organisations provided written information to inform the review. Representatives from the Panel attended various meetings of the Northampton Forums and received their responses to the core questions. The Scrutiny Panel undertook a number of site visits to various parks around the town. Desktop research was undertaken by the Scrutiny Officer, the findings of which informed the review.*

*A great interest was shown by a large number of the public, organisations and forums.*

**Councillor Elizabeth Gowen  
Chair, Scrutiny Panel 1 - Improving the  
Town's Parks**



*Being the only co-optee on the Scrutiny Panel from a park not situated in the town centre, and not considered to be a premier park it was very interesting to hear the problems that these parks experience. All the parks are diverse in character, environment, and use, but contrary to my previous view, the problems were much the same as experienced by my local parks. The site visits made to both formal parks and those with a more natural environment, were very informative, and gave the opportunity for members of the panel to highlight and discuss what they considered to be the strengths and weaknesses of each area. This and the answers to the core questions sent to many local organisations gave a clear picture of the problems that the users of the parks experienced. Some were known to me, others were ones I had not even considered. There was the opportunity to exchange ideas which I found most useful, and the whole experience will hopefully benefit all the wonderful green spaces in Northampton, but especially, as an out of town park containing a Scheduled Monument, raise the profile of my local parks and out of town parks in general.*

**Mavis Wilmshurst**  
**Chair, West Hunsbury Parks**  
**Co- Optee – Scrutiny Panel 1 – Improving the Town’s Parks**

## Co-Opted Members

The Scrutiny process benefitted from the expertise and knowledge of four co-opted Members to reviews this year.

*On being invited as a co-optee to the Scrutiny Panel for Northampton’s Parks I found a door opened that for a lay person is a rare privilege. Not only to understand the workings and decision process of NBC, but to express views and feelings that represented of the Friends of the Racecourse and other friends groups. The discussions and site visits showed the diversity of ideas which not only helped to build the final report but to take back to the Friends of Northampton Racecourse (FONR) and complement and swell our discussions in the future. Overall an experience I would not have missed and would recommend to anyone.*

**Alan Borrell**  
**Vice Chair, Friends of Northampton Racecourse (FONR)**  
**Co-Optee – Scrutiny Panel 1**  
**– Improving the Town’s Parks**

## Scrutiny Panels

**How has the work of the Scrutiny Panels made a difference to the Council and our residents?**

Recommendations from three Scrutiny reviews that were undertaken during 2012/2013 are being implemented and monitored by the O&S Committee.



### **Serious Acquisitive Crime (SAC), Violent Crime and Community Safety**

This high profile Scrutiny review highlighted the need to:

- 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

Recommendations of the review were around the themes:

- Housing
- Planning/Regeneration
- Partners and Agencies
- Neighbourhood Wardens
- Community Forums
- Northants Probation Service
- 

Cabinet accepted all of the recommendations contained within the report and Overview and Scrutiny will monitor the implementation of its recommendations in September 2014.

### **Retail Experience**

This was another high profile Scrutiny review that received a wealth of evidence from key agencies, partners and the general public.

24 recommendations were included in the report. They were broadly focussed on the retail experience, cleansing and partnership working.

Cabinet accepted all of the recommendations contained within the Overview and Scrutiny report and congratulated the Scrutiny Panel on its high quality, comprehensive report. Overview and Scrutiny will monitor the implementation of its recommendation in June 2014.





## Infrastructure Requirements and Section 106 Agreements

This in-depth review focused on:

- Identifying the infrastructure requirements to Northampton and the surrounding areas
- Evaluating how the infrastructure will be delivered through Section 106 Agreements/ Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)
- Identifying any funding gaps and how these will be filled
- Understanding the management of S106 funding

The Scrutiny Panel formally informed Cabinet that it was satisfied that the infrastructure requirements are identified in the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Infrastructure Delivery Plan up to 2026.

Recommendations of the review were around the themes:

- Infrastructure requirements
- Affordable housing

Cabinet accepted the recommendations contained within the Overview and Scrutiny report and the Committee will monitor the implementation of the recommendations in the autumn 2014.

West Northamptonshire  
Joint Core Strategy  
Infrastructure Delivery Plan  
Update 2012



## Review work 2013/2014

Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton has undertaken some excellent review work again this year.

The best practice Scrutiny review work has continued to be built upon. Over the last year, Scrutiny reviews have attracted interest from both external organisations and the public.

Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton continues to be Councillor-led and focuses on the major issues affecting the town. It has therefore carried out some very high profile reviews this year, the impact of which will be reported in next year's O&S Annual Report:

## Improving the Town's Parks

Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton has undertaken some excellent review work again this year.

## Management and Regulation of Private Sector Housing (Including HMOs)

The purpose of this review was to investigate the regulation and management of private lettings, both by landlords and agencies.

The O&S Committee, at its work programming event in March 2013, agreed to include a review of investigating the regulation and management of private lettings, both by landlords and agencies. These were issues that had been identified by the Cabinet Member



for Housing as one of her key priorities. The O&S Committee commissioned Scrutiny Panel 2 to undertake the review.

An in-depth review commenced in July 2013 and concluded in April 2014.

The Scrutiny Panel established that the following needed to be investigated and linked to the realisation of the Council's corporate priorities:

- **Context of private sector housing market including:**
  - Changes over the last ten years
  - Future trends
- **Baseline data:**
  - Private Sector Housing Strategy
  - Existing legislation and options available to local Councils for additional legislation
  - Options for licensing of HIMOs
- **Empty Homes Programme**
  - Evidence from expert internal witnesses
  - Evidence from expert external witnesses
  - Desktop research
  - Best practice data

Recommendations were around the themes:

- Licensing and Legislative options
- Priorities for the Private Rental **Sector**

*An in-depth review took place between July 2013 and the end of April 2014.*

*The Scrutiny Panel held a number of interviews with the Cabinet Member (Housing), Senior Staff at Northampton Borough Council and external expert witnesses. Desktop research was carried out by the Scrutiny Officer.*

*This was a very informative review; which received a wealth of evidence. A lot of expert advisors gave up their time to attend a meeting of the Scrutiny Panel to provide information, advice and comprehensive written evidence*

**Councillor Joy Capstick**  
**Chair, Scrutiny Panel 2 – Management and Regulation of Private Sector Housing (Including HIMOs)**

## Impact of the Welfare Reform Act

The purpose of this review was to evaluate the effect of the Welfare Reform Act on the public and Council employees.

The O&S Committee, at its work programming event in March 2013, agreed to include a Review of evaluating the effect of the Welfare Reform Act on the public and Council employees. This was an issue that had been identified by the Cabinet Member for Finance as one of his key priorities for the year. It was also suggested by members of the public as a key issue for scrutiny review. The O&S Committee commissioned Scrutiny Panel 1 to undertake the review. An in-depth review commenced in January 2014 and will conclude in July 2014, reporting the findings to the O&S Committee in the autumn 2014.



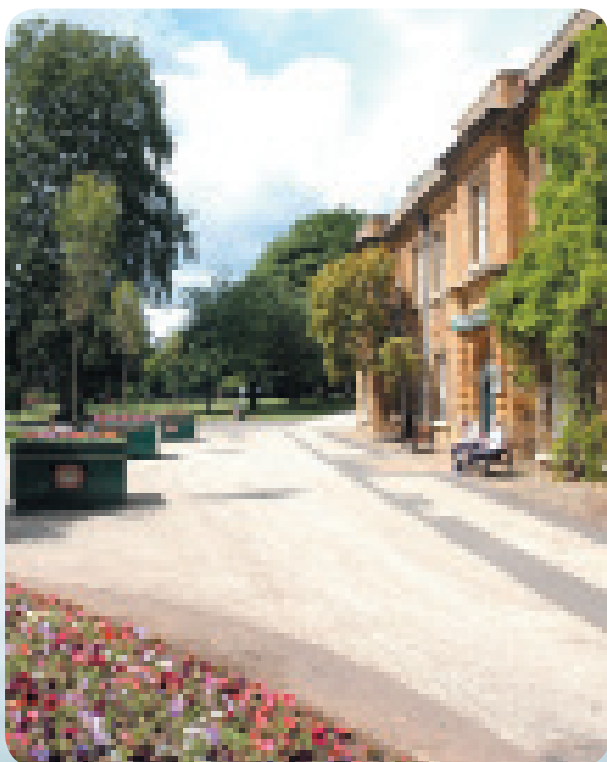
## Looking ahead

The Work Programme for 2014/2015 has been approved and the Scrutiny Panels will begin to scope the reviews shortly. They will be looking at the following important topics:

- Interpersonal Violence
- Poverty in the town
- Keep Northampton Tidy

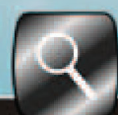
The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will look at:

- Arms' Length Management Organisation (ALMO)
- The new bus terminal



## What are our challenges for 2013/2014?

- To build on O&S's achievements as identified in the Overview and Scrutiny Excellence Plan (2013-2015).
- To continue to ensure the O&S work programme reflects concerns of service users, community and public – ensuring that a wide range of organisations, partners and the public are consulted with for suggestions for scrutiny review and then on the actual work programme.
- To ensure O&S is able to respond effectively to legislative requirements, such as the new powers, for example, wider powers to influence policy and public service delivery in their area – for example investigated issues beyond its traditional remit but affect local people.
- To ensure O&S works with the community and key partners to respond to concerns.
- To continue to ensure that the work of O&S has a positive effect on decision-makers and provide evidence that it has made a real difference. Recommendations made in 2013-14 will be monitored and their impact reported on in the Annual Report 2014-2015.
- To continue to increase public participation in O&S at Northampton by increased public suggestions for scrutiny review and increased attendance at O&S Committee and Panel meetings. This process has increased year on year.



## Glossary of Terms

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### **Call-In**

The process by which the O&S Committee considers whether a decision is properly taken or is the right decision..

### **Cabinet (Executive)**

The Executive body responsible for day-to-day running of the Council and the development of policy. Cabinet Members have portfolios or areas of responsibility (e.g. Housing) for which they take executive decisions.

### **Councillor (Member)**

An elected local representative on the Council, a Councillor represents the interests of the people who live in their ward and Northampton as a whole

### **Pre-decision Scrutiny:**

O&S may inform Executive decisions on topics on the Forward Plan by making evidence based recommendations or advice prior to formal decision by the Executive.

### **Review**

A study led by Scrutiny Councillors on a current issue, selected by the Committee. It aims to identify areas of good as well as poor practice, compare performance with other councils' countrywide, and challenge existing practice where relevant.

The Review will lead to recommendations for improvements to relevant Cabinet Members as well as outside agencies, such as health trusts. While these are not obliged to support the recommendations, effective consultation has been proven to lead to consensus and to Cabinet support for reviews undertaken.

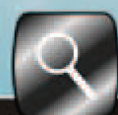
## Contact details for more information

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Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, is always very happy to speak to local people about the activities of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. If you have any comments or queries, or would like to suggest areas which may be appropriate topics for future work, you can speak to her by calling 0300 330 7000 or by email.

You can view recent agendas and minutes on the Council's website at [www.northampton.gov.uk](http://www.northampton.gov.uk) or by contacting Democratic Services

Overview and Scrutiny has its own dedicated website within the Council's website. The current work of Overview and Scrutiny and the reports already published are available on this site. The address is [www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny](http://www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny)



## Suggest an item for Overview and Scrutiny to investigate?

Do you have any suggestions for issues for inclusion onto the Overview and Scrutiny future Work Programme? If so please complete the form opposite and return to: -



**Overview and Scrutiny**  
Northampton Borough Council  
The Guildhall  
St Giles Square  
Northampton  
NN1 1DE



**Email:** Scrutiny

Just as Overview and Scrutiny has considerable influence when used in the right way, there are times when other procedures are more appropriate.

Overview and Scrutiny cannot help in the following areas:

- Individual complaints about specific issues - these should be taken up through Northampton Borough Council's Customer Care Procedure.
- Proper accounting for money of the Council - this is the responsibility of the Audit Committee - for information, contact 01604 837356
- The conduct or behaviour of a councillor or officer - this is the responsibility of the Standards Committee - for information, contact 01604 837101.

It cannot be guaranteed that items raised in this way will actually be considered by Overview and Scrutiny.

### Suggested Issues for overview and scrutiny

Name: .....

Email: .....

Telephone: .....

### Issues suggested for inclusion on the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

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If English is not your first language and you need help in translating this document please contact Tracy Tiff on **01604 837408**.

Jesli angielski nie jest Twoim jezykiem ojczystym a potrzebujesz pomocy w przetlumaczeniu tego dokumentu, prosze skontaktuj sie z Tracy Tiff pod numerem 01604 837408

Если английский не Ваш родной язык и Вам нужна помощь с переводом этого документа, то свяжитесь с Трайсу Тиф. Тел. 01604 837408

Haddii afka Ingriisigu aanu ahayn luuqad-daada kowaad oo aad u baahan-tahay in lagaa caawiyo turjumidda warqaddan fadlan kala xidhidh Tracy Tiff tiifoonka 01604 837408

如果英語不是你的主要說用語言而需要幫助將這份文件翻譯，請致電 01604 837408 向 Tracy Tiff 提出要求。

যদি ইংরেজী আপনার মাতৃভাষা না হয় এবং এই দলিলটি অনুবাদে আপনার সাহায্যের দরকার হয় তবে অনুগ্রহ করে ট্রেইসি টিফ-এর সাথে 01604 837408 এই টেলিফোন নম্বরে যোগাযোগ করুন।

## LARGE PRINT AND TAPE

If you would like this document as large print or as a tape recording please call **01604 837408**

