

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 26 January 2015

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillor Brian Sargeant (Chair), Councillors Tony Ansell, Rufia Ashraf, Mick Ford, Elizabeth Gowen, Phil Larratt, Niles Ramesh Parekh, Suresh Patel, Sivaramen Subbarayan, Matthew Lynch and Anna King

Councillor Mary Markham Cabinet Member (Housing)
Councillor Tim Hadland Cabinet Member
(Planning, Enterprise and Regeneration)
Councillor Brendon Eldred Cabinet Member for Community Engagement
Councillor Mike Hallam Cabinet Member for Environment
Councillor Alan Bottwood Cabinet Member for Finance

Officers	David Kennedy	Chief Executive
	Julie Seddon	Director of Customers and Communities
	Glenn Hammons	Head of Corporate Finance
	Phil Morrison	Assistant Head of Finance
	Kelly Watson	Strategic Finance Manager
	Francis Fernandes	Borough Secretary
	Carol Cooper Smith	Interim Enterprise Zone Coordinator
	Tracy Tiff	Scrutiny Officer
	Nicola Brindley	Democratic Services Officer

Speaker Tom Appleyard

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Jamie Lane (Chair); Councillor Brian Sargeant (Deputy Chair) was in the chair for the meeting. Apologies were also received from Councillor Norman Duncan.

2. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2014 as a true and accurate record.

3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

Tom Appleyard addressed the Committee and advised that in his opinion, litter was the first sign of social decay, it reflected on senior Management of the Council, Councillors, Businesses, Police, Council agencies and the people who live in Northampton, it had a negative effect on businesses affected the corporate image of established businesses. Almost £400.000 pounds a year is spent on clearing up litter; this does not include the loss of business or visitors to the town. It's not just unsightly it is also dangerous to wild life, he would have expected to find human waste and bottles of urine around our town 100 years ago, not in the 21st century.

He attended the Keep Northampton Tidy Review meetings as a member of the public.

This review would have implications for Northampton for several years, yet the attendance did not reflect the importance and consequences for the people of Northampton.

Mr Appleyard gave some statistics regarding the attendance of Panel members at meetings and site visits.

It also came as a disappointment evidence was not taken from witnesses with eyes on the ground, for instance, Ramblers Association, R.S.P.C.A to name a few. Some witnesses did not answer the core questions; instead they chose to focus on what they are doing now.

He confirmed that any information was good information and had submitted a paper which he hoped would help the Chairman and his committee in their quest for answers, should the committee fail to submit a coherent joined up plan; the outcome will be the same as the 2007 review.

Mr Appleyard was thanked for his address.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

There were none.

5. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORTING AND MONITORING WORKING GROUP :COUNCIL-WIDE DRAFT BUDGET 2015 - 2020

Councillor Brian Sargeant advised the Committee that the Reporting and Monitoring Working Group had looked at the Council wide draft budget 2015-2020 in detail at its recent meeting. It had identified four budget proposals for the Committee to scrutinise in detail:

General Fund Saving Options

- Contributions to reserves in forecasting potential risks – medium term savings in respect of the Environmental Services Contract and links to the proposals contained within the budget of Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) regarding a proposed saving of £7 million on waste and how this could potentially impact on NBC in the region of £1.7 million. It was confirmed that NCC was taking a proactive and positive approach in looking at these potential savings, such as increasing recycling and reducing residual waste.
- Implementation of service reviews, restructures and employee costs review to ensure that they are deliverable

David Kennedy, Chief Executive, confirmed that 8% more capacity was added by staff working 37 hours per week to 40. Posts were being held vacant for temporary staff and they had made the decision to make services more effective with less staff. No concerns with the implementation overall and consultations were ongoing.

- Creation of the Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH) budget - to ensure that they have been allocated in the right way
- Business rates retention scheme – to ensure the right level of forecasting etc. and how the business rates have changed over the years

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked questions made comment and heard more information about business rates and businesses within Northampton Borough:

There is growth in the number of businesses within the borough but the overall value of businesses has reduced, This is largely due to the fact that each business was able to lodge an appeal with the valuation office against the current value of their business and if successful this would lead to a decrease. This has occurred for a number of businesses and therefore the overall value in the Borough had reduced. This trend is also seen nationally.

That a lot of small businesses had been created through the success of Enterprise Zone to date. Over 682 jobs have been created and over 10,000sq ft of business space created. This is having a positive impact on the local economy.

Depending on the value of the business, they could apply for a whole raft of reliefs which may be available to a particular business. An example of this would be the small business rate relief, some of which the Council would be compensated for by Central Government. There are a lot of businesses within Northampton who are in receipt of reliefs which support the future sustainability of their business.

The growth in businesses across Northampton is not specific to any particular type of business or sector.

Councillor Alan Bottwood confirmed that Government funding was decreasing but the costs were increasing. A key funding stream is business rates, the more businesses we are able to attract to the area the more business rates the public sector will receive.

This would be beneficial and was a key reason that the Council make the investments they do into the local economy. This would increase the Council's income to support future service provision.

The comments made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the above budget proposals would be appended to a report to Cabinet on 18 February 2015.

AGREED: That the comments made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the budget proposals are appended to a report to Cabinet on 18 February 2015.

6. UPDATE ON THE TREE POLICY FOR THE BOROUGH

Councillor Mike Hallam, Cabinet Member for Environment, gave the Committee an update on the tree policy for the borough. Salient points:

Council motion would be brought to Overview and Scrutiny for the Committee to look at in detail.

Working Group to be put together to use all Councillor expertise across the board as trees were the most complained about to Councillors in their wards.

Maintenance would play an important part of the working group

Councillor Mike Hallam confirmed that in the 1960s and 1970s a lot of trees had been planted and only half of them were expected to survive. He wanted to work with the Committee and provide full support of his officers and implement the recommendations.

The Chair thanked Councillor Mike Hallam for providing an update on the Tree Policy for the borough.

Councillor Anna King confirmed that it was a good idea and they had eight new trees installed in her ward.

Councillor Mike Hallam confirmed that if a tree is removed then it was better value to have one team remove 90% and another team to come back and remove the stump. At present the policy was only to remove dead trees. Timescales were an important element as it was a long and cumbersome process.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the update.

7. TREE MAINTENANCE WORKING GROUP

The Chair advised the Committee that following the motion that was carried at full Council on 15 September 2014:

‘There are many areas of the Eastern District where historic planting of the wrong kind of trees in the residential areas cause a number of problems for residents – from light being blocked from homes, to fallen debris, to damage to property from roots.

‘This Council resolves to develop a plan to consider removing trees that are identified as problematic and consider replacing them with smaller trees more suited to residential areas.

‘This Council recognises this issue is complex and many trees are located on housing land that will soon be managed by Northampton Partnership Homes so therefore refers this matter to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider.’

It was suggested that an Overview and Scrutiny Working Group that would look at tree maintenance issues would convene and report back its findings to the March 2015 meeting of the Committee. Councillor Phil Larratt would chair the Working Group, Councillor Dennis Meredith would be asked to join the Working Group. Other members were Councillors Anna King, Rufia Ashraf and Suresh Patel. The first meeting of this Group was on Wednesday 4th February at 2.30pm in the Godwin Room.

AGREED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Tree Maintenance Working Group is set up and reports its findings to the March 2015 meeting of this Committee.

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

(A) IMPROVING THE TOWN'S PARKS

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertook further monitoring of the accepted recommendations contained within the Overview and Scrutiny report: Improving the Town's Parks.

Councillor Tony Ansell advised that the Management Park meeting still had issues where one organisation dominated the meeting.

Councillor Anna King confirmed that the Friends of Eastfield Park meetings had worked very well. The meetings had been set up and things moved forward. They elected the Chair before the meeting by email.

Julie Seddon, Director of Customers and Communities confirmed that this was a helpful suggestion of emailing members to elect a chair before the meeting and she would take it on board.

Councillor Mike Hallam confirmed that he had a number of conversations with Abington Park Group and they now had facilities to store equipment. The bowlers were the group who they were most concerned about but the response from the footballers had been positive. A member of staff had now been employed by the Northampton Leisure Trust to keep continuity. He confirmed that it had been well publicised and accepted Councillor Tony Ansell's offer to being invited to their next meeting.

AGREED: That the report be noted and no further monitoring is required.

9. SCRUTINY PANELS

10. SCRUTINY PANEL 1 (INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE)

The progress report of Scrutiny Panel 1 (interpersonal violence) was noted.

11. SCRUTINY PANEL 2 (POVERTY IN THE TOWN)

The progress report of Scrutiny Panel 2 (Poverty in the Town) was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

AGREED:

- (1) That the progress report of Scrutiny Panel 2 (Poverty in the Town) is noted.
- (2) That the revised membership of the Scrutiny Panel is approved.
- (3) That evidence from additional expert advisors, Nationwide Building Society and the Northampton Pensioners' Forum, to this Scrutiny review is noted.

12. SCRUTINY PANEL 3 (KEEP NORTHAMPTON TIDY)

Councillor Tony Ansell confirmed that the final meeting will be in March and was disappointed about the amount of witnesses who did not provide oral evidence but provided written documents instead. Apologies were received on the day of the last meeting from a number of scheduled witnesses.

The progress report of Scrutiny Panel 3 (Keep Northampton Tidy) was noted.

13. PARKING WORKING GROUP

Councillor Brian Sargeant, Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Parking Working Group, presented the scope of this scrutiny activity for approval.

AGREED:

- (1) That the scope of the Parking Working Group is approved.
- (2) That the report of the Parking Working Group is presented to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 23 March 2015.

14. POTENTIAL FUTURE PRE DECISION SCRUTINY

There were none.

15. URGENT ITEMS

There were none.

The meeting concluded at 19.00 hrs