

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 20 February 2020

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillor Lane (Chair), Councillors Ansell, Ashraf, G Eales, Roberts, Russell, Sargeant and Smith

Councillor Anna King, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Engagement
Councillor Stephen Hibbert, Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing
Phil Harris, Director for Housing and Wellbeing
Vicki Rockall, Community Safety and Engagement Manager
Chris Carvell, Environmental Services Contract Manager
Tracy Tiff, Democratic and Member Services Manager

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 January 2020 were signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

2. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

There were none.

4. NORTHAMPTON FORWARD

The written briefing on Northampton Forward was noted.

The Chair suggested that the Leader would be asked to explain how the work is put out to tender and how the companies are selected. A further written update would be asked for, for the meeting of the Committee on 20 April 2020.

AGREED: That a further written update would be asked for, for the meeting of the Committee on 20 April 2020.

5. PRE DECISION SCRUTINY - TRIAL OF BUY BACK PROPERTIES

Councillor Hibbert, Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing, and Phil Harris, Director of Housing and Wellbeing presented the written briefing on the Trial of Buy Back Properties. Phil Harris PH advised that buy back has been operating for years. He explained the process. It was confirmed that this is currently a pilot scheme and would be

evaluated at the appropriate point. So far three properties had been let, with 21 further houses to progress

The Committee made comment, asked questions and heard:

- The Chair commented that the Committee would set up meetings so that pre-decision scrutiny could take place.
- In response to a query, Phil Harris confirmed that there are proportion that were sold at a discount but the Council can only buy back properties at market value. The Scheme has not been publicised as there are concerns about the market having the potential to inflate.
- Rates are affordable rents but not social rent.
- Phil Harris explain that if the house owner decides to sell within ten years of purchasing a right to buy they must offer it to the Council first, who has eight weeks to respond. Should the Council decide it does not want the property it must produce a certificate stating that it had been offered the opportunity to buy but had declined. Some properties that have been offered to the Council and it has not purchased and some have been in ownership for longer than ten years.
- The decision in respect of this decision was taken in June 2019.
- The Committee discussed the key worker initiative at Belgrave House

The Chair suggested that a Working Group is convened to undertake this pre decision scrutiny. It was agreed that Councillor Roberts would Chair the Working Group and Councillors G Eales and Smith volunteered to be members of the Working Group. Other members of the Committee would be invited to join the Working Group.

The inaugural meeting would receive details of costings and background to the scheme.

AGREED: That a Working Group comprising Councillor Roberts (Chair), Councillors G Eales and Smith is set up to undertaken pre-decision of the trial of buy back properties. Further members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be invited to join the membership of the Working Group.

6. CSP PERFORMANCE

Councillor King, Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Safety and Vicki Rockall, Community Safety and Engagement Manager presented the crime and disorder report highlighting the salient points.

The Committee made comment, asked questions and heard:

- In response to a query regarding businesses and crime, the Committee heard that the BID was working on new app and businesses can register to use the app. Further information could be provided to a future meeting on the effectiveness of the app and figures collated by the Police and the BID
- Operation Lily in the town centre.

Councillor King, Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Safety and Vicki Rockall, Community Safety and Engagement Manager, were thanked for their address.

The Chair requested that a further update is presented to the meeting of the Committee on 13 July 2020.

AGREED: That the update is noted and a further update is presented to the meeting of the Committee on 13 July 2020.

7. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY

The Committee received the written briefing note regarding KPI PP22 – Percentage of hackney carriages and private hire vehicles inspected which comply with regulations. The salient points were highlighted.

The Committee made comment, asked questions and heard:

- The Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Safety advised that it is anticipated that a check will be undertaken
- The Committee commented that there needs to be a strategic approach to contingency and this KPI should be monitored in the next couple of months.

AGREED: That the update is noted and a further report is presented to the Committee at its meeting on 13 July 2020.

8. TREE MAINTENANCE POLICY

Chris Carvell, Environmental Services Contracts Manager, presented the written brief and updated Tree Policy to the Committee. He drew the Committees attention to the salient points.

The Committee made comment, asked questions and heard:

- In response to a query regarding amendment to Tree Policy in 2020, the Committee was advised that there had been slight changes. The Policy enhanced tree work project and is in year four of the five year. Stakeholders have been contacted in zone 4.
- In response to trees on the Eastern side of the town, it was confirmed that
- no one wants to take out healthy trees, but the maintenance is working better now. Appropriate works are in line with updated policy.
- The Street Tree's in Far Cotton had generated funding from the Woodland Trust, NBC and Idverde. Ten trees had been planted. This may be replicated in the next financial year.
- The Committee commented that the Far Cotton trees project is a great success. It is a real people led project – wardens appointed local people helping to maintain the trees.

- In response to a question it was confirmed that through the contract there is an Educations and Communications Officer. The Officer visits various Groups and explains the Tree Policy and notes comments made.
- In answer to a query about the robustness of the Policy, it was confirmed that this could be reviewed on an annual basis.
- The Tree Policy includes trees that are the responsibility of NBC not NPH.
- The Committee asked that the Chief Executive, NPH, is asked to attend the – next meeting and explain how Trees and land is monitored. The Tree Policy would be considered by the Committee at its meeting in January 2021.

AGREED: 1) That that the Chief Executive, NPH, is asked to attend the – next meeting and explain how Trees and land is monitored

2) That the Tree Policy would be considered by the Committee at its meeting in January 2021.

9. MONITORING OF O&S REPORTS

(A) CEMETERIES

Chris Carvell, Environmental Services Contract Manager, presented the action plan to the Committee, highlighting the key points.

In response to a query regarding recommendation 15, the Committee heard that scoping works is taking place regarding the extension of Dallington cemetery to adjoining field.

The Committee noted the updated.

AGREED: That a further update is presented to the Committee at its meeting on 8 June 2020.

10. SCRUTINY PANELS

11. SCRUTINY PANEL 1

The Committee noted a briefing note detailing progress of the food poverty review.

The Deputy Chair of the Scrutiny Panel conveyed concerns regarding the evidence provided by an external expert advisor at the previous meeting of the Scrutiny Panel.

12. GANGS AND KNIFE CRIME WORKING GROUP

The written update was noted.

13. POTENTIAL FUTURE PRE DECISION SCRUTINY.

As discussed at an earlier agenda item, the Committee would undertake pre-decision scrutiny of the trial of buy back properties.

14. URGENT ITEMS

There were none.

The meeting concluded at 7:45 pm