



NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY

NEWSLETTER

SCRUTINY NEWSLETTER

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introduction

Welcome to the summer edition of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny E-Bulletin, the e-mail newsletter of Northampton Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which is available for employees and the public



The bulletin will keep you up to date with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Task and Finish Group news, training events, additions to the website, forthcoming meetings and new developments.

Who is involved in Scrutiny



The Overview and Scrutiny Policy Committee comprises fourteen councillors representing each political group:



Councillor Brendan Glynane (Chair)
Telephone: **(01604) 453833**
Email cllr.bglynane@northampton.gov.uk



Councillor Christopher Malpas (Deputy Chair)
Telephone **(01604) 233640**
Email cllr.cmalpas@northampton.gov.uk



Councillor Anjona Roy (Deputy Chair)
Telephone **07976 260268**
Email cllr.aroy@northampton.gov.uk



councillors: -



Marion Allen
(Chair Allotments (Water Charges) Task & Finish Group)



Brandon Eldred
(Chair Housing Repairs Task and Finish Group)



Brian Hoare



Jamie Lane
(Chair Tree Policy Task & Finish Group)



Lee Mason



Andrew Simpson



Richard Church



Michael Hill



Michelle Hoare



Barry Massey



Margaret Pritchard



How To Get Involved

There are a number of ways in which you can find out about the work of Overview and Scrutiny. Details of all of the current reviews are given on page 2 but if you want to know more you can...

Attend a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

All Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings are held in public and anyone is welcome to attend to listen to the proceedings. The majority of Overview and Scrutiny meetings are held in the Jeffery Room at the Guildhall, St Giles Square, Northampton. Seats are available at the back of the committee room for members of the public and times and date of forthcoming meetings are published on the Council's website under Council, Government and Democracy. Only on rare occasions, when certain types of confidential information are being discussed, are members of the public not allowed to attend Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings.

As well as wanting to keep people informed about Overview and Scrutiny, the Councillors on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Task and Finish Groups are keen to hear your views on the topics they are looking at. There are a number of ways in which your views can be heard by the Councillors. You can..

Write to the Task and Finish Groups

If you have a particular interest in a review you can write to or e-mail the relevant Task and Finish Group to give your views to the Councillors. If you do choose to make a contribution to a Task and Finish Group's review any comments you make will not be made public unless you have agreed to this.

Become a Witness

One of the main ways in which the Task and Finish Groups gather the evidence they need to inform their reviews is through inviting individuals with a particular knowledge of the subject to attend their meetings. This enables the councillors to make better informed recommendations but it also gives individuals and organisations from outside the Council a way of having their voice heard.

Is there anything you would like the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review?

The Committee welcomes suggestions for topics of inquiries and will consider issues put forward by members of the public, interest groups or businesses.

Suggestions for review must meet the following criteria:-

- affect a group or community of people (scrutiny will not usually look at individual service complaints)
- relate to a service, event or issue in which the council has a significant stake
- not be an issue which overview and scrutiny has considered during the last 12 months
- not be a planning issue or other matter dealt with by another Council Committee, except where the issue relates to process.

Receipt of your request will be acknowledged within 10 working days. You will be advised if the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will include the issue on its future work programme.

Why not fill out the online form to suggest a subject for review. Alternatively, please write, telephone or fax.



Northampton Borough Council
The Guildhall, St. Giles Square
Northampton NN1 1DE



01604 837408



01604 837395

Website



For more information on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or the time limited Task and Finish Groups please visit our website:

www.northampton.gov.uk

Scrutiny can be found under the section **Council Government and Democracy**.

Watch out for the Winter edition of the Scrutiny newsletter, which will detail Scrutiny news, including details of the final reports of the Task and Finish Groups.

Feedback

We are always looking at ways we can improve the information the e-bulletin provides so we need your feedback!

You can sign up to receive e-mail or hard copies of the **Scrutiny Newsletter** by



telephoning **Tracy Tiff** on **01604 837408**



Or email **ttiff@northampton.gov.uk**

Task and Finish Groups

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee sets up time limited Task and Finish Groups to carry out important reviews, which will make focussed valuable, recommendations to the Cabinet.

All Non-Executive Councillors can put themselves forward to join Task and Finish Groups to review issues of interest and importance and inform critical policy development.

Three Task and Finish Groups (Planning, Homelessness and Public Engagement & Communications) have completed their investigations and Cabinet accepted all of the recommendations made in their final reports. You will find these reports on the Council's website under Council, Governance and Democracy.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the recommendations made in the three Task and Finish Groups' report at future meetings. The timetable is detailed in the Overview and Scrutiny Monitoring Work Programme 2006/2007.

Outcomes of Reviews 2005/2006

Planning Task and Finish Group

The Task and Finish Group made a number of recommendations to Full Council which are aimed at increasing public satisfaction with both the Planning Committee and the Council's website.

Many of the Key recommendations of the review have been implemented and have helped to build upon the success of the Planning Committee meetings at Northampton. Regarding the recommendations yet to be implemented, the Corporate Manager (Planning) is working steadily with both Chair of the Planning Committee and the Portfolio Holder regarding the actioning of these recommendations and progress is ongoing.

Since this Review, improvements have been made:-

- Staff keep a general watch for anyone who looks unsure or bewildered at the Planning Committee and offer advice.
- The Chair announces any items withdrawn at short notice at the start of the meeting.
- The Planning Committee agendas are bound in a professional manner with the meeting dates advertised on the inside of the front cover.

- The Protocol for the meeting is printed on the inside front page of the agenda outlining who can speak, for how long and how business is conducted.
- Those registered to speak are informed verbally of the Protocol prior to the meeting so that they are aware of what to expect. The Protocol is published on the website.
- The Council's website indexing planning applications in alphabetical order, by street name and by postcode so that finding an application is easier.
- Northampton Borough Council's website has been updated so that public speaking is no longer reported as a six month trial.

Homelessness Task and Finish Group

The Homelessness review has been well received by external scrutiny peers. For example, the report has been commended by a Local Authority, whose Scrutiny Commission is due to embark upon a review of homelessness in its borough.

The Local Authority's Lead Scrutiny Councillors and Scrutiny Support Officer met with the Homelessness Task and Finish Group, and relevant Northampton Borough Council employees to seek advice on how to carry out this review.

Since this Review was undertaken, there have been significant improvements in the service. For example:-

- A Rent and Housing Options Toolkit has been devised and implemented
- A robust partnership between Northampton Borough Council and Northamptonshire County Council has been introduced
- The Homeless Forum was re-launched in May 2006
- The project to introduce a Corporate Debt Policy was circulated to stakeholders in July 2006
- The supplier to introduce a new housing IT system was agreed in June 2006
- A draft Temporary Accommodation Strategy has been developed
- Sign-off procedures for evictions and temporary accommodation were introduced in May 2006
- The Rough Sleepers Group has been re-launched and will develop a Rough Sleeping Strategy and responsive service.

Public Engagement and Communication

The Task and Finish Group made a number of recommendations around management and resources, information and co-ordination, systems and protocols, engagement with diverse communities and future work and

review. The report and its recommendations was well received and accepted by the Cabinet at its meeting in July 2006. It is scheduled in the Overview and Scrutiny Monitoring Work Programme 2006/2007, to monitor the implementation of the recommendations in January 2007.

The Homelessness and Public Engagement and Communications Task and Finish Groups' reports have also been published on the Centre for Public Scrutiny's (CFPS) website.

Protocol Working Group

This Working Group has concluded its work of producing good practice protocols and guidance information to assist with the effective functioning of Scrutiny. The Protocols that have been produced are:-

- Call-In Protocol
- Work Programme Protocol
- Inclusion of Non-Executive Councillors in the Scrutiny process
- Witness Protocol and guidance notes
- Public Address at Overview and Scrutiny Committees Protocols

The Protocols will form part of an Overview and Scrutiny Toolkit and will be appended to the Council's constitution.

The Working Group has produced a Co-Optee Guidance Booklet, which contains practical advice and sets out the role of co-optees to Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups.

Copies of the Protocols and Guidance notes are published on the Council's website under Council, Governance and Democracy. The Co-optee Guidance Handbook has been published on the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CFPS) website.

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has published its Annual Report 2005/2006 on its website under Council, Government and Democracy. Copies have been circulated to all Councillors and a copy is available in the Council's One Stop Shop and local libraries.

The Annual Report summarises the work of the Committee over the past Municipal Year detailing Overview and Scrutiny achievements during 2005/2006 and the way that the Scrutiny function has developed over the past year.

Annual Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

The Committee has agreed its Annual Work Programme 2006/2007 which is published on the Council's website under Council, Government and Democracy.

The Annual Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme comprises three sections:-

- Overview and Scrutiny Annual Work Programme 2006/2007
- Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group Annual Work Programme 2006/2007
- Overview and Scrutiny Monitoring Work Programme 2006/2007

The Annual Overview Scrutiny Work Programme consists of a number of the highest priority topics that the Committee and its Task and Finish Groups will review and monitor. Issues that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be looking at over the next Municipal Year, include:-

- Housing Repairs
- Allotments (water charges)
- Leisure Options
- Homelessness, with an emphasis on rough sleepers
- Street Scene
- Dispersal Orders

Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) Working Group

This Working Group carried out a short, focussed piece of work that looked at the effectiveness and integrity of the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) process.

The Working Group obtained evidence from internal witnesses and gathered statistics and data. Desktop research, looking at models of good practice, was also carried out. The Working Group's report was presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 26 June 2006 and all of the recommendations contained in the report were accepted. The review resulted in a number of worthwhile recommendations aimed at improving the Best Value Performance Plan process. A copy of the Working Group's report can be found on the Council's website under Council, Government and Democracy.

Task and Finish Group Work Already Started

Housing Repairs Task and Finish Group

This Task and Finish Group is looking at the Housing Repair service within the Council. Two members of the Northampton Tenants and Council Together Group (NTACT) have been co-opted onto the Task and Finish Group to provide valuable expertise and knowledge in the topic being reviewed.

The Task and Finish Group held its initial meeting in July to scope its review and agreed that it would collate its evidence by a variety of methods including interviews with internal and external witnesses, gathering statistics and data and a visit to a best practice Council. The information gathered will contribute to the Task and Finish Group's final report, which will be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee early in 2007.

Allotments (Water Charges) Task and Finish Group

A notice of motion carried at Full Council at its meeting on 22 May 2006 included *"That a time limited scrutiny investigation is undertaken for the proposed water charges to allotment holders."*

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to include Allotments (Water Charges) in its Work Programme 2006/2007 and set up a Task and Finish Group. Two members of the Northampton Allotments Society have been co-opted onto the Task and Finish Group to provide valuable expertise to the review.

The Task and Finish Group held its first meeting in July to scope its review and agreed methods to collate its evidence, such as, visits to allotment sites in Northampton, and gathering statistics and data. This information will contribute to the task and Finish Group's final report which will be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee later in the year.

Tree Policy Task and Finish Group

This Task and Finish Group is reviewing the Council's current tree maintenance operations and will produce a draft Tree Maintenance Policy for the Cabinet's consideration.

The Task and Finish Group gathered its evidence by carrying out desk top research, looked at models of good practice, interviewing internal witnesses and attending a site visit to a Northampton park. The Tree Policy Task and Finish Group has now reached its conclusions and will present its report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 4 October 2006.

Leisure Services Task and Finish Group

This Task and Finish Group is reviewing the Council's leisure services. The Group is due to hold its initial scoping meeting to decide on the evidence that should be gathered to form its review.

The Group is scheduled to submit its report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2007.

If you would like to receive a paper copy of the Task and Finish Groups' final reports please telephone **Tracy Tiff** on **01604 837408**.

Staff Training

Training Sessions have commenced for members of staff who may be called as witnesses by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. A half day seminar for the Corporate Senior Management Team (Directors and Corporate Managers) took place on 14 June 2006 and covered:

- A national Perspective on scrutiny
- Scrutiny Principles and Practices
- Councillor/employee relationships in Scrutiny i.e. being a witness
- Officer support to Scrutiny
- Good Practice case studies
- Scrutiny terms of reference and protocols
- Specific issues relating to NBC

Whole day seminars for Managers and Team Leaders will follow and will cover:-

- A national perspective on scrutiny
- Scrutiny Principles and Practices
- Councillor/employee relationships in scrutiny i.e. being a witness



- Officer involvement and support in Scrutiny
- Good Practice case studies
- Scrutiny terms of reference and protocols in Northampton Borough Council
- Preparation for being called as a witness to a Scrutiny Committee meeting/call-in hearing etc.
- Framing reports for submission to Scrutiny
- Information for Scrutiny Reviews
- Role-play - "being called as a witness". Overview and Scrutiny Councillors will be asked to attend to take part in the role-play presenting their answers to the mock questions.



East Midlands Scrutiny Network Meeting News

Councillor Glynane, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and the Scrutiny Officer attend the East Midlands Regional Local Government Association (EMRLGA) Scrutiny Network meetings. The Scrutiny Network has been running for some time and brings together Scrutiny Chairs and Scrutiny Officers from the East Midlands to discuss issues of mutual benefit.

At the meeting held in April, presentations were given on:-

- Overview and Scrutiny Capacity Building Programme - South East Employers
- Reviewing Partnerships Sharing Success North East Derbyshire District Council and Chesterfield Borough Council

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Scrutiny Officer attended East Derbyshire District Council and Chesterfield Borough Council's high profile launch of their 'Partnership Development and Evaluation handbook, which had been produced as part of their review of partnerships and sharing success. Upon recommendation from Councillor Glynane, the Council purchased three copies of the handbook which will help to assess the Council's role and contribution to existing partnerships.

The next meeting of the EMRLGA Scrutiny Network is scheduled for 21 September 2006.

Copies of agendas and minutes can be found on the EMRLGA website www.lg-em.gov.uk

Local Democracy Week

Local Democracy week is scheduled to take place during the week commencing 16 October 2006. Further events have also been scheduled. Key aims are for Local Councils to engage with citizens, including young people, to help promote and encourage active citizenship and participation in local democracy.

An all day event will take place on Saturday 14 October 2006, at the Guildhall, hosted by the Northampton Borough Council Forums. Attendees will include members of the Area Partnerships and Forums and others too. The main themes will be:-

- Northampton as it is now (both in terms of communities and physically)
- The history of Northampton
- How Northampton can be improved for the future

Overview and Scrutiny will contribute to a workshop at this event - 'Communications by the Council and how they can be improved'. The Public Engagement and Communications Task and Finish Group report will be circulated at the workshop. Councillor Malpas, Chair of this Task and Finish Group, will provide an update on the report highlighting the recommendations and progress made to date.

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will then give a brief synopsis of what Overview and scrutiny is and how the Scrutiny structure works at Northampton Borough council.

Forthcoming Meetings

All Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings are held in public and anyone is welcome to attend. Agendas and minutes are published on the Council's website under Council, Government and Democracy.

Date of Meeting	Venue
Wednesday 4 October at 7.00pm	Jeffery Room at the Guildhall
Tuesday 12 December at 6.00pm	Jeffery Room at the Guildhall
Wednesday 31 January at 6.00pm	Jeffery Room at the Guildhall
Tuesday 27 March at 6.00pm	Jeffery Room at the Guildhall
Wednesday 13 June at 6.00pm	Jeffery Room at the Guildhall
Wednesday 25 July at 6.00pm	Jeffery Room at the Guildhall



NORTHAMPTON
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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

REFERRAL FORM

Please complete this form if you wish to raise an issue for Overview and Scrutiny to consider and return it to:

Northampton Borough Council The Guildhall, St. Giles Square, Northampton NN1 1DE
Telephone: 01604 837408 **Fax:** 01604 837395 **Email:** ttiff@northampton.gov.uk

1 What would you like Overview and Scrutiny to investigate? Please state the service area, Council activity or topic:

2 Please state briefly why you would like this matter examined:

3 Have you had any previous contact with the Council or your local Councillor concerning this matter? If so, please give details:

4 Please give us your details so that we can contact you. Details will remain confidential and will not be released into the public domain. Forms without contact details will not be considered

Your name

Your address and postcode

Ward (if known)

Your email address (if applicable)

Receipt of your request will be acknowledged within 10 working days. You will be advised if the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will include the issue on its future work programme.