

# **NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **CABINET**

**Wednesday, 19 May 2010**

**PRESENT:** Councillor B. Hoare (Chair); Councillor P. D. Varnserry (Deputy Chair);  
Councillors Beardsworth, Church, Crane, B. Markham and Perkins

### **1. APOLOGIES**

None.

### **2. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 28 April 2010 were signed by the Chair.

### **3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES**

Chris Swinn addressed Cabinet in respect of Item 6, "New Tenants Participation Structure", and stated that he had expected another consultation with tenants to take place given that the previous ones had failed. He referred to the MORI survey that had been undertaken in February. Chris Swinn noted that tenant satisfaction had gone up by approximately 1% per survey. He asked Cabinet to clarify what was meant by "tenant participation". He referred to two properly constituted mechanisms that the Council had put in place and then ended. Chris Swinn commented that lessons needed to be learnt from the past and he queried what guarantee there was that the new proposed mechanism would work. He commented that there was a need for the Council to go out to tenants rather than tenants to come to the Council. He stated that estate walkabouts, etc, needed to be advertised. Chris Swinn concluded by commenting that tenants' consultation was about partnership working and that problems and solutions should be jointly agreed between tenants and the Council.

Shayley Watson, on behalf of Eastfield Residents Association, addressed Cabinet in respect of Item 6, "New Tenants Participation Structure", and referred to her address to Cabinet in December 2009 in respect of concerns about the lack of consultation with tenants regarding the proposed PFI project. She stated that tenants wanted to be involved and the Council needed residents to be on their side. She referred to HCA advice that the Council must consult all tenants. Eastfield Residents Association wanted three representatives to put forward tenants' views. She stated that tenants should not have to seek out answers to their questions. In answer to a question, Shayley Watson confirmed that her comments were mainly directed around the PFI project. She also acknowledged that the newssheet "In My Home" invited residents of Eastfield and Thorplands to get involved.

Tony Mallard, on behalf of Eastfield Residents Association, addressed Cabinet in respect of Item 6, "New Tenants Participation Structure", and commented upon concerns in respect of the lack of consultation in terms of the proposed PFI project; and that residents had been asked to join steering groups but nothing had been heard since. He stated that residents had concerns about the future of their homes; Housing Officers wandering around estates without explanation gave rise to unease. He stated that residents' views should be taken seriously and that Eastfield and Thorplands residents wanted three representatives each on any steering group.

Beverley Mannell addressed Cabinet in respect of Item 6, "New Tenants Participation Structure", and stated that the response to the Overview and Scrutiny recommendations was

long awaited. She concurred with the views of the speakers and stated that tenants wanted what they wanted. She observed that there had been no consultation with tenants on the findings from Overview and Scrutiny. She asked a question aimed at the Director of Housing, the Portfolio Holder for Housing and the Chief Executive as to why tenants had had to wait so long for a forum. She noted that the Audit Commission and the TSA required this. She also noted that under the TSA the Council now had to meet seven standards and that the Council needed to empower its tenants to make their own decisions.

#### **4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

#### **5. ISSUES ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES**

None.

#### **6. NEW TENANTS PARTICIPATION STRUCTURE**

Councillor Mildren addressed Cabinet and referred to the Call-In on 28 October 2009 and referred to paragraph 3.1.2 (3) as to how the Council was going to be proactive to ensure a good turnout at local meetings. He also noted that by October, the Council needed to show tenants how well it was doing against the standards set by the TSA. He commented that the timing was very tight.

Councillor Clarke addressed Cabinet and commented that Overview and Scrutiny had found that the Council had failed its tenants in terms of tenant participation and that these failures were in terms of leaflets and meetings. He noted that the goal posts appeared to have been changed in mid game. The Chair asked Councillor Clarke which part of the Overview and Scrutiny report he was referring to. Councillor Clarke commented that the Council had failed to hold proper consultation and that the current proposals were unsatisfactory. He believed that the Council was at the bottom of the league in respect of tenant participation and enquired what Cabinet what it was going to do to deal with the failures identified by Overview and Scrutiny. He suggested that Cabinet reject the report, as it did not answer what had been raised in the Call-In.

Councillor Beardsworth, as the Portfolio Holder for Housing, submitted a report that set out the response of the Director of Housing to the recommendations made by Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 following the Call-In of the new Tenant Participation Structure on 28 October 2009. She commented that since the Call-In, the TSA (Tenants Services Authority) had been established and had now published its expectations that Councils explore a variety of methods of consultation with its tenants. Tenants were already being asked to vote on the schemes that had been agreed during estate walkabouts that had also involved tenants. Councillor Beardsworth referred to other initiatives such as tenant auditors and mystery shoppers, which were already in place and proving successful. She stated that traditional committees were not necessarily representative of the whole constituency. She referred to the Appendix, which set out all the mechanisms of consultation with tenants that the Council was adopting. The TSA were very clear that the Council needed to try to get to all tenants and to go out to them. The intention was that tenants should be able to influence service delivery and the proposed area meetings would be part of this arrangement.

The Director of Housing noted that in terms of the addresses made to Cabinet in respect of the PFI project, that this report did not impact on that although it was accepted that quicker progress should have been made and that arrangements to start up the Steering Group should have been further advanced.

The Chair commented that it was recognised that the report to Cabinet following Overview and Scrutiny's recommendations was beyond the usual timescale but that was because of the new situation and different expectations placed on the Council. It was proper for the Council to properly understand the advice issued by the TSA before reporting. The circumstances would be reported back to Overview and Scrutiny.

The Director of Housing noted that in terms of the PFI project for Eastfields and Thorplands, tenants would be involved in the Steering Groups and that Overview and Scrutiny had accepted an area based approach as opposed to a Borough wide body.

Councillor Church stated that he agreed with Chris Swinn that the lessons from the past needed to be learnt. Most importantly, that previously the majority of tenants had not been involved with the arrangements that the Council had established and that the individuals involved had not been representative of the wider tenants' group. He believed it important that the behaviour of a few individuals should not drive other interested people away. It was confirmed that the area meetings would have terms of reference that would cover issues such as respect for others.

In answer to a question, the Director of Housing commented that some advice had come forward as to how co-regulation might work but there was still a concern as to what "local standards" actually meant; for example, did this mean Borough wide or in terms of individual estates. In either case the intention was to get information down to the grass roots level and to build up trust and joint working over time.

- RESOLVED**
- (1) That the Director of Housing's response to the Overview and Scrutiny Call In on 28 October 2009 be noted.
  - (2) That approval be given to the proposed Housing Area Meetings to begin work on the review and development of the service standards.
  - (3) That a further report be submitted to Cabinet in September in respect of progress being made towards the October deadline to inform tenants of the Council's achievements towards the standards set out by the TSA.

## **7. FREE SWIMMING: ONE YEAR ON**

Councillor Mildren commented that this was a good news story and that the financial impact had been better than expected. He queried what the impact would be once the scheme came to an end in 2011.

Councillor P D Varnsvery, as the Portfolio Holder for Engagement, submitted a report that set out a summary of leisure services' performance during the first year of the Government's Free Swimming Initiative and also set out an analysis of usage. Councillor Varnsvery commented that the scheme had been very successful and this was due to the hard work of the Head of Culture and Leisure and his staff in implementing it. He stated that the initiative had contributed positively to the health and well being of the under-16s and over-60s and that it had been the right decision of his predecessor to agree the option to extend the scheme to the under-16s. He noted that the Council compared very favourably with much bigger Councils who often had more swimming facilities available and he also referred to the investment that had been made at Lings Forum as a consequence of the success of the scheme. Councillor Varnsvery made reference to the table set out on page 3 and noted the estimated operating surplus of £47,125. He also referred to the nominal fee to cover administration costs that would allow access by the under-16s and over-60s to other leisure facilities.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

## **8. RECHARGEABLE REPAIRS POLICY**

Councillor Mildren addressed Cabinet and queried whether this was an update on existing policy or a new one. He also queried how successful the Council had been in reclaiming costs following reinstatement works when tenants had vacated properties. He also asked whether the Council self insured or insured against damage where the cost could not be claimed back and the impact on the HRA in terms of money that could be reclaimed from tenants.

Councillor Clarke addressed Cabinet and commented that he believed, generally speaking, that the policy was a common sense approach but stated it would be helpful if the list of examples of when a charge might be made, set out in paragraph 3.1.3, had been more exhaustive. He commented that accidental damage should not be charged for and that the document should also set out the Council's obligations, not just those applying to tenants. He made specific reference to the charges made to tenants for the cleaning and upkeep of communal areas, which in some cases tenants were not receiving the service despite paying for it.

Councillor Beardsworth, as the Portfolio Holder for Housing, submitted a report which set out a draft Rechargeable Repairs Policy, which was intended for use by Housing Officers. She noted that the principle of making rechargeable repairs had already been included in the new tenancy agreement circulated to tenants. She noted the comments made about using discretion in the case of accidental damage. The Portfolio Holder suggested that the second aim set out in paragraph 2 of the Appendix be deleted as this was adequately covered by the other four bullet points.

**RESOLVED:** That subject to the Appendix being amended by the deletion of the second bullet point in paragraph 2, "Aims of the Policy", the Rechargeable Repairs Policy be approved.

## **9. PERFORMANCE**

### **9.1 PERFORMANCE MONTHLY REPORT - MARCH 2010**

Councillor Mildren noted that there had been a slight increase in the red measures and also noted that Council Tax collection was very close to target, which he thought was good in the present circumstances. He observed that the downturn in recycling and composting noted on page 7 might be due to the bad winter weather.

Councillor Clarke referred to his questions to Council in respect of the percentage of fly tips removed within 2 working days and what 48 hours actually meant. He believed Councillors should have an answer that they could be confident in and therefore would be able to judge the Council's performance.

The Chair observed that several emails had been sent to Councillors noting that "48 hours" meant "2 working days". He queried why Councillor Clarke kept repeating the question but would re-send the email. He also noted that if the Council was unaware of fly tips, then they could not be removed. He suggested that if Councillor Clarke had examples of fly tips that had not been dealt with after several days then he should quote them and they would be investigated.

Councillor B Markham, as the Relevant Portfolio Holder, submitted a report that informed Cabinet of the Council's performance for the monthly performance indicators for March 2010 and quarterly performance indicators for quarter 4, January to March 2010. He noted that the Council was on target to meet its corporate priorities and that in June Cabinet would receive the outturn performance for 2009/10, which could then be compared against 2008/09.

The Chair observed that the overall approach of the Cabinet adopting a strategic approach was correct and that there were different opportunities for Portfolio Holders to discuss with Directors issues in more detail. He noted that delivery of the Corporate Plan was on target.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 19.16