

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 3 - IMPROVEMENT, PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE

Thursday, 12 November 2009

PRESENT: Councillor Jamie Lane (Chair); Councillors Scott Collins; Keith Davies, Jane Hollis and David Palethorpe (substituting for Councillor Tim Hadland)

Julie Seddon, Director of Environment & Culture (Item 7)
Cheryl Doran, Ass Head of Customer Services (Item 8(a))
Dale Robertson, Head of Performance & Improvement (Item 4)
Adam Goodacre, Performance Officer (Item 4)
Tony Kinear, Performance Officer (Item 4)
Gary Youens, Political Assistant
Tracy Tiff Scrutiny Officer

Councillor Brian Hoare, Leader of the Council
Councillor Brian Markham, Portfolio Holder (Performance & Support)
(Item 8a)
Councillors Tony Clarke, Irene Markham, Malcolm Mildren and John Yates

Three members of the public present were.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Matthew Golby and Tim Hadland.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Call In Hearing held on 16th July 2009 and the meeting of the meeting also held on 16th July 2009 were agreed as a true and correct record.

3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

There were none.

5. PERFORMANCE PLUS UPDATE

Dale Robertson, Head of Performance and Improvement, together with two Performance Officers, gave the Committee a short presentation on Performance Plus, how to access and use performance information for Overview and Scrutiny.

The main areas covered by the presentation: -

- What we have improved
- What does Performance Plus do
- Performance Plus – the benefits
- How does it work
- Performance alerts and what they mean
- Director of Travel
- How will Performance Plus support the role of Overview and Scrutiny
- How will performance be reported to Members
- Corporate Plan priority overview
- Detailed information on areas under performing

The Committee asked questions and heard: -

- In response to a query regarding data monitoring, the Performance Team undertakes monitoring, back to the source data. Sampling testing is undertaken and by the end of the year, 100% of testing has been completed.
- Background evidence is attached to data.
- A member of the Team is assigned to a department as a Service consultant.
- The Authority is level 3 for its data quality and is within the top 25% of Authorities within the country.
- The Performance Team moderates targets and provides challenge to the Service area, also comparing with the Audit Commission's data.
- Accepted recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny Reviews (Task and Finish Groups) can be included onto Performance Plus for monitoring.
- Parallel reporting will continue until April 2010.

The Committee welcomed Performance Plus, in particular the inclusion of the monitoring of accepted Overview and Scrutiny Review report recommendations.

6. REPORT BACK ON CABINET'S RESPONSE TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORTS

(A) CUSTOMER SERVICES

Councillor Brian Markham, Portfolio Holder for Performance and Support, and Cheryl Doran, Assistant Head of Customer Services, informed the Committee of Cabinet's response to the Overview and Scrutiny report – Customer Services: -

- Cabinet recorded its appreciation to the Task and Finish Group in identifying further ways in which the Council could improve the customer experience.
- Noted that many of the Task and Finish Group's recommendations had been addressed in the Service Plan 2009/2010 for Customer Services, specifically recommendations 1,4,5,6,10,12,13,14 and 15
- Accepted recommendations 3 and 17, which would be addressed in the delivery of the Customer Excellence Strategy.
- Accepts in principle recommendations 2,7,9,18 and 19, which would be reviewed by the One Stop Shop Transformation Project Team.

- Rejects recommendation 8 as a Health and Safety Review had previously been done for Cliftonville House and all Display Screen Equipment risk assessments in the Contact Centre have been completed.
- Accepts recommendation 16 to include a review of the Council's core documents on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3' work programme.
- Advises that no further action is required in respect of recommendation 11 to offer documents in tape or compact disc forma as this is already covered within the existing policy.

In response to a query regarding the rejection of recommendation 8, the Committee was advised that a display screen equipment and lighting assessment had been carried out. One Officer has been provided with a desk light.

It was noted that significant progress had been made on recommendations 13 and 14. The One Stop Shop Transformation Project Team had been set up. Staff was being consulted upon the provision of uniforms and positive feedback was being given.

The Chair commented that the Task and Finish had been very pleased to note that some of its recommendations had been introduced and completed prior to the completion of the report, which had been acknowledge in the report.

AGREED: (1)That Cabinet's response to the Overview and Scrutiny report – Customer Services be noted.
(2)That the implementation of the accepted recommendations be monitored as part of the Overview and Scrutiny monitoring process.

7. UPDATE - EVALUATING WAYS OF DELIVERING NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

Julie Seddon, Director of Environment and Culture, gave the Committee a progress report on the issue – Evaluating Ways of Delivering Neighbourhood Services. The Committee agreed to Julie Seddon's suggestion that this Committee receive regular process reports on this issue.

The Committee heard: -

- The following services are currently being market tested:
 - Waste
 - Ground services
 - Street care
- A joint procurement exercise is currently underway in partnership with Daventry District Council.
- To ensure that there is a robust challenge; a reference case is being developed for the in-house service to ensure that a robust comparison can be made with the offer from private sector suppliers.

- The OJEU notice has been issued, due to the fact that after the commencement of the process, a risk of legal challenge was identified in relation to the format of the notice and the associated prequalification questionnaire.
- Cabinet will receive various reports throughout the process.
- It is anticipated that the preferred bidder would be identified towards the end of this year.
- Should the decision be made to outsource this service, the Council would be in a position to sign contracts around January/February 2011.

The Committee made comment, asked questions and heard: -

- In response to a query regarding how dialogue with the preferred bidder would affect existing staff, Julie Seddon advised that it is realised and is one of the biggest factors that is being investigated. It was further recognised that pensions was another factor for consideration.
- It would be ensured that the final decision would create an improvement in the Service or a reduction in cost or both. There was an absolute given that that there would be no detriment to the service. The decision must be for the best of the citizens of the town and the Council.
- It was confirmed that a commitment had not been given to joint services with Daventry; it was just a possibility at this stage.
- Julie Seddon is an active member of the Northamptonshire Waste Management Partnership. There is a need to ensure that this Council fits with the Service Level Agreement (SLA), in terms of the outcomes delivered. The Authority is also working with the Waste Authority, (Northamptonshire County Council) to ensure that it fits also with the Waste Strategy.
- Flexibility would be built in to the contract, taking into consideration issues such as the growth agenda.
- The methodology being used for this Project is Prince2. A very knowledgeable project manager, with experience of waste management projects, is leading the Project.
- Dale Robertson, Head of Performance and Improvement, apprised that that the software package *Performance Plus* could support this Project. The other management tool that is being used for the Project is Mytool, which enables the user to put together a robust business case.

- AGREED:**
- (1) That the Committee receive a progress report on this issue – Evaluating Ways of Delivering Neighbourhood Services at every meeting.
 - (2) That as part of a future progress report, details of how *Performance Plus* can support the Project be provided.

8. TASK AND FINISH GROUP UPDATES

(A) COST OF CONSULTANTS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The Chair advised that the Cost of Consultants Task and Finish Group had now agreed its scope for the approval of this Committee, a copy of which was attached to the agenda. The Task and Finish Group was now at the evidence gathering stage,

and should the Committee approve its scope, it was planned that the Group would complete its work in March 2010.

AGREED: That the scope of the Overview and Scrutiny Cost of Consultants Task and Finish Group be approved.

(B) REPORTING AND MONITORING WORKING GROUP

The Chair advised that the Reporting and Monitoring Working Group had now agreed its scope for approval of this Committee, a copy of which was attached to the agenda.

AGREED: That the scope of the Overview and Scrutiny Reporting and Monitoring Working Group be approved.

9. REPORT BACK FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Committee noted the report of the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee that detailed the proposed new structure for Overview and Scrutiny.

The Chair advised that the agreement of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee was as follows: -

Successful Overview and Scrutiny is dependant upon a process of investigations, analysis and challenge which allows non-Executive Members to question the rationale behind Executive decisions and policies, and to assess how effectively the Council is meeting its legal obligations and policy objectives.

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee agreed that taking this into consideration, Option A is the preferred method to implement the new proposed Overview and Scrutiny structure as it provides for a more flexible structure and captures many of the issues suggested at the Overview and Scrutiny Structures Workshops. The Committee felt that it would be more open and transparent for the Scrutiny Panels to normally meet in public if this is possible, with proportionality rules applying.

The Committee also felt that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be chaired by a Member of the main opposition Political party and that meetings should take place approx every 6 weeks (7 per year per Committee/Panel) taking into consideration Christmas and the recess period.

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee agreed that: -

- (1) That Option A the preferred new Overview and Scrutiny Structure, with the proviso that the Scrutiny Panels would normally meet in public and proportionality rules apply.

- (2) That details of the proposed new Overview and Scrutiny structure be forwarded to the Constitution Working Group so that necessary proposed changes to the constitution can be investigated prior to the suggested structure being presented to full Council for approval.
- (3) That it be recommended to the Constitution Working Group that the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee be invited to be included in discussions in respect of the proposed new Overview and Scrutiny structure and report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.
- (4) That it be recommended to the Constitution Working Group that the new structure for Overview and Scrutiny be implemented from the start of the Municipal year 2010/2011.
- (5) That it be recommended to the Constitution Working Group that Overview and Scrutiny no longer undertake the roles of the performance monitoring and finance roles and that these become the sole responsibility of the Audit Committee.

The Committee was advised that a workshop to compile the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme had been scheduled for 11 March 2010.

Meetings of the Constitution Working Group had been set and it was expected that the Group would look at the proposal for a new Overview and Scrutiny structure towards the end of January/February 2010.

10. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Committee raised concerns regarding the following Performance Indicators: -

- BV12 – The number of working days/shifts lost due to sickness absence
- BV12r (Rolling 12 months)

Councillors queried whether temporary staff was employed to cover sickness absence or whether it was accepted that there would be a reduction in service.

It was suggested that it be proposed to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee that this Committee set up a Task and Finish Group into Absence Monitoring, suggesting that it commences in March 2010. This would be in place of the Review of all Council core documents and leaflets Task and Finish Group. This Review would then become a short, sharp Appreciative Inquiry.

The Committee raised further concerns regarding the following Performance Indicators: -

- BV8 – The percentage of invoices for commercial goods and services paid by the Authority within 30 days of being received.

Comments made included: -

- There was a need for information in respect of whether the Authority paid invoices on time and details of the money owed to the Authority.

AGREED: That the Head of Finance be asked to attend the next meeting of this Committee on 13 January 2010 at 7.15pm to provide further details in relation to BV8 and provide a response to the Committee's queries.

11. WORK PROGRAMME 2009/2010

In discussing its Work Programme, the Committee confirmed that it be proposed to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee that this Committee set up a Task and Finish Group into Absence Monitoring, suggesting that it commences in March 2010. This would be in place of the Review of all Council core documents and leaflets Task and Finish Group. This Review would then become a short, sharp Appreciative Inquiry. It would be requested that copies of all Council core documents be sent to Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, by 13 January 2010.

Councillor Hollis asked to be included in the membership of the Reporting and Monitoring Working Group.

12. FORWARD PLAN

In discussing the Forward Plan for the period 2 November to 28 February 2010, the Committee commented on the need for pre-decision scrutiny of the item Delapre Abbey Options Appraisal Report, but noted that this was due to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 16 December 2009. Councillors further commented that this could be a cross cutting issue and come under the remit of more than one Overview and Scrutiny Committee and therefore it may be prudent for the Overview and Scrutiny Management to allocate which Overview and Scrutiny Committee should receive a report on this issue. The Committee therefore suggested that the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee be asked to include this on the agenda of the next meeting of that Committee on 14 December 2009.

Should the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee agree that this issues falls under the remit of this Committee, that an update be provided to the next meeting of this Committee at its meeting on 13 January 2010. Councillor David Perkins, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Gavin Chambers, Head of Finance, would be asked to attend to present the information.

13. URGENT ITEMS

There were none.

The meeting concluded at 7:45 pm