

Report of the
**Overview & Scrutiny
Committee**

**Annual Report
2010/2011**



**NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

A Message from Councillor Christopher Malpas, Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

This Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report published by Northampton Borough Council gives a summary of the Committee's activities over the past twelve months and maps out its plans for the forthcoming year.

Overview and Scrutiny is a vital part of the Northampton Borough Council's responsibility to its residents. It works on behalf of residents to highlight issues of concern and makes recommendations for improvement to the Council and local partners.

It is important for Overview and Scrutiny to become involved with decisions at an appropriate early stage to apply real influence and therefore play the important role of 'critical friend' to Cabinet.

The first piece of pre-decision scrutiny work that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertook, early in this new Council year (2010/2011), was looking at the Delapre Abbey Options Appraisal. I am pleased to report that the Committee undertook five pre-decision scrutiny activities during this year and already has one pre-decision scrutiny activity programmed for 2011/2012.

Overview and Scrutiny has involved and worked closely with external partners and organisations who, through the Reviews carried out this year, have all contributed to the well being of the people of Northampton. I highlight that the support of all those involved in Reviews is required for a successful outcome.

Training is vital for Scrutiny to continue to be effective. I am delighted to say that Member Development is taken very seriously at Northampton and as part of this a dedicated four-year rolling training programme for Overview and Scrutiny was introduced last year. I was pleased that Scrutiny of Crime and Disorder was included within the Overview and Scrutiny Training Programme and facilitated by an expert in this field, Ed Hammonds, of the Centre for Public Scrutiny.



**Councillor Christopher Malpas
Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee**



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Key Achievements

How was this impact made during 2010-2011?

The current structure for Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) was introduced in May 2010, comprising an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and three Panels. The Panels carry out in-depth Scrutiny Reviews, whilst the O&S Committee concentrates on strategic issues, including holding the Executive to account, performance management, scrutiny of crime and disorder.

This structure has markedly raised the profile of scrutiny at Northampton through a variety of methods, including:

- Increased and thorough pre-decision Scrutiny with the full involvement and support of the Executive and Senior Management
- Notable increased public participation in the O&S Process e.g:
 - Scrutiny Panel meetings are held in public and have attracted in excess of seventy public attendees,
 - speakers or witnesses at the meetings this year
- Increased public suggestions for Scrutiny Reviews
- Meticulous performance management scrutiny
- Decision makers providing important evidence to the Review process
- Non-Executives who are not Scrutiny Members sitting on Scrutiny Panels
- Structured Crime and Disorder Scrutiny
- Four year rolling Training Programme for non-Executives
- Increased co-option of expert advisers to Reviews

Involvement of Non- Executives (not Scrutiny Members) in Overview and Scrutiny

This O&S structure enables non-Executives, who are not O&S Members, to be fully involved in the O&S process.

Key Example: The Scrutiny Review of the Northamptonshire Alcohol Strategy was made up of seven non-Executives, four of which were not O&S Councillors, demonstrating the complete involvement of non-Executives in the O&S process.

Crime and Disorder Scrutiny

Overview and Scrutiny has always undertaken scrutiny of crime and disorder but last year improvements were made to the process. The scrutiny of crime and disorder was formalised, putting in place clear working arrangements between the Chair of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and the Committee. A bi-annual report from the CSP will inform the O&S Committee of work undertaken, non-Executives will decide if further review or scrutiny is required. This report will focus on the levels of performance and whether crime has increased in the light of reduced resources, if so what measures have been taken to meet any shortfall in performance. This demonstrates excellent working relationships between non-Executives and partners.

“Overview & Scrutiny for Northampton Borough Council have shown great interest in Community Safety/Crime and Disorder issues over the years. They have always taken a positive approach to any pieces of work undertaken, ensuring that all relevant partners are engaged in the process. Any recommendations and findings that they have provided have added value to the delivery of the service and approaches taken in addressing issues. Therefore, it is accurate to say that with the formalisation of scrutiny arrangements for Crime & Disorder, Overview & Scrutiny have been well placed to respond effectively to legislative requirements.”

Debbie Ferguson,
Community Safety Partnership Manager



Strengthened Performance Management Scrutiny

Over the last year, performance management scrutiny has been built upon and called for significant recommendations for change.

Key example: Non-Executives worked with the Portfolio Holder regarding the reporting of NES09 – Flytipping.

There were two main outcomes from this Scrutiny activity. The introduction of processes to capture fly-tipping data from housing areas and record them by land-type. Operational working practices have been reviewed and changed to ensure that the standard is complied with. Data quality checks take place through corporate validation processes to ensure reporting is correct and robust. This demonstrates non-Executives challenging and improving performance at the Council.



“Overview & “Northampton Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Effectively scrutinising performance

”,.....the scrutiny review of specific measures was introduced to the agenda. This has resulted in measures being reviewed on an exception basis with relevant officers being called to present to the committee. Officers are scrutinised on performance, the causes of under performance and the corrective actions being taken. Members have undertaken active debate and offered support and challenge to the recommendations being made by officers to deliver service improvements.

Additionally, the Committee undertook an Appreciative Inquiry into the fly-tipping performance measure in December 2010 at the request of the Cabinet Performance Portfolio Holder. The Inquiry enabled scrutiny members to independently review the issues being raised and to make recommendations

The Committee has actively promoted the scrutiny of performance data and has undertaken this role effectively with deliverable outcomes and support to service areas.”

Kathy Brooks
Performance Team Leader
Performance & Change”



Critical Friend to Cabinet

Robust Pre-Decision Scrutiny

The O&S structure enables regular, robust pre-decision scrutiny. Five robust pre-decision scrutiny activities were undertaken this year.

Key example: pre-decision scrutiny of Environmental Services Procurement.

Cabinet agreed that the Council's waste, grounds and street care services should be market tested. The procurement would be undertaken in partnership with Daventry District Council. This project was recognised as being a major procurement initiative for the Council. In addition to its large scale and ambitious scope, it presented the added challenge of being undertaken in partnership with another Local Authority. Its outcomes had the potential for a major impact on key factors, i.e. customer experience, finance and organisational reputation. Risk and legal implications were noted as potential concern. For these reasons, the process was selected for pre-decision scrutiny by O&S. A non-Executive from Daventry District Council was co-opted to the pre-scrutiny activity.

Upon completion of the pre-decision scrutiny process, O&S was satisfied a thorough process had been undertaken to determine the preferred bidder for the award of the proposed joint contract and was satisfied that robust mechanisms would be developed to ensure that costs and benefits would be appropriately shared between the two partner Councils and neither Council would in any way subsidise (or be subsidised by) the other.

This pre-decision scrutiny activity demonstrates non-Executives influencing organisational culture at the Council.

"The pre-decision scrutiny activity of Environmental Services Procurement demonstrated first-rate cross boundary working with a non-Executive from Daventry District Council. I am aware that O&S undertakes pieces of joint Scrutiny work with neighbouring Authorities and believe that this particular pre-scrutiny activity has added to the opportunity to build a strong foundation of joint scrutiny on issues of mutual interest.

I fully endorse the pre-decision Scrutiny process at Northampton and emphasise that the pre-scrutiny activities detailed above demonstrate non-Executives influencing organisational culture at the Council."

*Julie Seddon
Director – Environment and Culture
Northampton Borough Council*



Call-In

There were four Call-In Hearings during 2010/2011, which demonstrates that the decision-making process is transparent and open to challenge.

Influencing Policy Development

97.5% of Overview and Scrutiny's recommendations were accepted by Cabinet, which highlights that Overview and Scrutiny is working well at Northampton and making a significant influence of Council policy both in terms of holding the Cabinet to account and contributing to policy development and the well being of the citizens of Northampton.

Raising the profile of Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton

The Scrutiny Review process at Northampton is widely recognised both within the Council and amongst the citizens of Northampton.

Key Example: Non-Executives undertook a Review of the Northamptonshire Alcohol Strategy. The result was the Northampton Alcohol Harm Reduction Action Plan which the Northampton Partnership is recommended to adopt. The Chair of the Northamptonshire Partnership, along with representatives of various key Agencies, provided expert advice, thus key Agencies are recognising the value of the O&S process and the input that it was providing into this significant issue.

Non-Executives were able to add a new dimension to the focus of the Action Plan by bringing their own personal perspective and the expertise of key advisers to the Review. This demonstrates an excellent example of non-Executives fulfilling their role as a critical friend to an external partner, providing a well-researched report, with clearly evidenced recommendations.

"This was an important Review for Overview and Scrutiny to carry out as it had been identified that there was a need for an Action Plan. For Northampton. In the last CAA assessment it was reported that the majority of people in Northamptonshire drink alcohol without damaging themselves or others, but for a lot, alcohol causes problems, more so than elsewhere in the country. Alcohol consumption causes a high number of health problems and accidents in Northamptonshire, especially in Corby and the county town of Northampton. It is also a significant reason for the high levels of violent crime in town centres. In the CAA assessment it was noted that public bodies in Northamptonshire were not co-ordinating their activities well enough to deal with this.

I fully endorse the approach taken by Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton to this Scrutiny Review. It was a fair and balanced process that encouraged and obtained the co-operation of a number of key expert advisers from a variety of Agencies. The recommended Action Plan ensured that the maximum benefit was derived. This scrutiny process created a great opportunity to build a strong foundation of joint Agency working."

Councillor Brian Hoare
Chair, Northampton Partnership



Public engagement within the Overview and Scrutiny process at Northampton

O&S has included various issues referred to it from the public onto its Work Programmes. The details below provide key points of how O&S work has reflected the concerns of service users.

A representative of the local Athletics Club addressed full Council on 12 April 2010, conveying their concerns regarding the Lease arrangements for the athletics track. As a result, the Vice Chair of the O&S Committee requested that this issue be reviewed by O&S. A short sharp Review was undertaken.

Three meetings were held which attracted around 40 public attendees, of whom eight addressed the Committee and three were called as expert advisers. The press attended all meetings, publishing a number of articles about the Scrutiny Review.

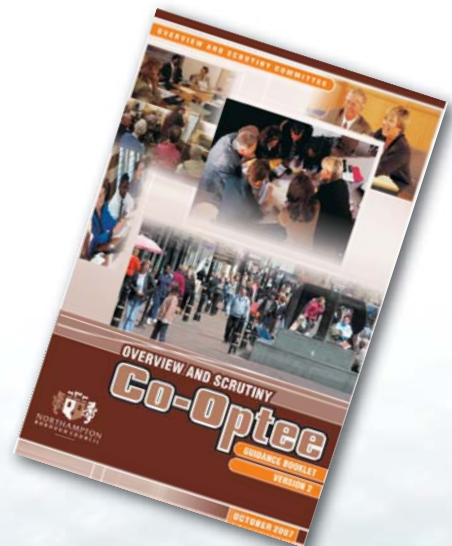
Representatives of the Athletics Club provided verbal and written evidence. The Chairman of the Football Club also provided evidence. Representatives of the Athletics Club and the Football Club attended the site visits to the local athletics track, which engaged them further in the O&S process.

Co-Opted Members

There were five co-opted Members to the Review process this year, whose expertise and knowledge played an important part in informing the Scrutiny Panels' Reviews.

"I found being invited onto the Overview and Scrutiny R & P Panel as a Co-Opted Member very enlightening. I also feel it is a good indication of how Community Representatives can work together with their Local Authority, leading to a better understanding of how difficult decisions are made and what part funding has to play in what can, or cannot be delivered. It would be nice to see similar initiatives rolled out in other areas within our Local Authorities."

Sheron Watson
Secretary, Northampton Federation of Residents' Associations
Co-Optee – Scrutiny Panel –
Neighbourhood Model



Scrutiny Panels

How has the work of the Scrutiny Panels made a difference to the Council and our residents?

Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton has undertaken some good Review work. A number of its Reviews and processes have been noted as examples of 'best practice'.

Details contained within the Centre for Public Scrutiny's News Bulletin September 2010 in the Section 'Best Practice from District Councils'

Recommendations from three Scrutiny Reviews that were undertaken during the latter part of 2009/2010 are being implemented:

"In Northampton, Scrutiny Members carried out a Review on Customer Services, which resulted in a number of recommendations relating to accessibility and customers' experience more generally. The recommendations were fed into the Council's Service Plan and informed and supported efficiency savings of £25,000 per year. The Council applied for external funding to implement wider recommendations for enhancing the One-Stop Shop, resulting in the award of £260,000 by the Northamptonshire Improvement and Efficiency Partnership"

Sheltered Housing and Housing Options for Older People

This high profile Review highlighted that the ageing population presents a huge challenge for the Council in a period of public spending cuts. It also presents a significant opportunity to improve the Services offered to older people in a way that effectively promotes independent living. The fact that there are more individuals aged over 60 than under 25 is a huge issue that should be addressed and the impact on Northampton understood and responded to. It was felt that the Council needs to develop a wide range of options to suit the needs of older and vulnerable people and that represent real choice in terms of the services offered.

The Review further concluded that the resident warden scheme should not be returned to as it would not improve services for older people. Another nine recommendations were called for which included improved consultation mechanisms with sheltered housing tenants and the introduction of a Policy for the storage of mobility scooters.

All the recommendations included in the Overview and Scrutiny report were considered for inclusion in the Cabinet report on the future of Sheltered Housing and Options for Older People that was produced after the completion of this Review. Cabinet formally congratulated the Task and Finish Group for the high quality of this report and the time and effort given to produce it.

This Review received a lot of public interest and press coverage. An interview with the Chair was broadcast on 'Anglia Tonight'.



Community Centres

This Review called for a proper Policy being put in place for the management of Community Centres. The Review concluded that it was clear that there was a need for Community Centres and such a Policy would be core to the way forward. It emphasised that there needs to be accessibility to community facilities for all Groups and put sixteen recommendations to Cabinet.

In considering the report of this O&S Review, Cabinet directed those conducting the current review of the future of Northampton's community centres to have due regard to Overview and Scrutiny's recommendations as it develops policy and practice for Northampton's community centres.

Cost of Consultants

This Review investigated a number of issues regarding the use of consultants and Agency labour at the Council. The recommendations called for:-

- the introduction of a procedure based on the document "Transforming the procurement of temporary, agency and interim staff: your toolkit for success", to be built into the Consultant engagement process
- an independent review after a set time period by the Head of Human Resources to ensure the engagement is still appropriate
- the Policy regarding the employment of Agency Staff to be expanded and reviewed
- setting a maximum percentage target for each directorate of Agency staff.

In considering the recommendations, Cabinet approved four of the recommendations but rejected the recommendation to introduce a floating workforce instead it required Heads of Services when they reviewed their structures for the 2011/2012 budget that they considered multi skilling opportunities across the Service areas.



Review work 2010/2011

The best practice Scrutiny Review work has been built upon and Task and Finish Groups have now become Scrutiny Panels but this is not just a name change. The main difference is that the Scrutiny Panels hold their meetings in public and as reported earlier in the Annual Report has attracted a lot of public interest and participation.

Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton continues to be Member-led and focuses on the major issues affecting the town and has therefore carried out some very high profile Reviews this year, the impact of which will be reported in next year's O&S Annual Report:

- **Northamptonshire Alcohol Strategy** – to review the local delivery of Northamptonshire Alcohol Strategy in Northampton

The Review recommended, after considerable scrutiny input:-

- The adoption of the Northampton Alcohol Harm Action Plan.
- The support of Northampton's three MPs to be sought, to raise the issue within Government regarding the concerns that licensed premises have difficulty in obtaining polycarbonate bottles and glasses at appropriate prices.

"The result of this Scrutiny Review is a piece of work, which recommends to the Northampton Partnership that it adopts the Northampton Alcohol Strategy Action Plan. The Scrutiny Panel was reassured that there were a lot of positive actions taking place and examples of good joint working between all the Agencies involved. The Scrutiny Panel was confident that demonstrable measures were being taken to address alcohol misuse in Northampton."

Councillor Brendan Glynane
Chair, Scrutiny Panel H



• **Commissioning Framework for the Voluntary and Community Sector** –

To investigate the development of a Commissioning Framework for the Voluntary and Community Sector.

The key recommendation of this Review was:-

- The development of a consultation draft of a Commissioning Framework for the Voluntary and Community Sector by a Partnership Working Group made up of representatives of the Council, Community Enabling Fund Advisory Panel (CEFAP), and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).



“This Scrutiny Panel worked to prepare its report in close cooperation with the Voluntary and Community Sector. Various organisations from the Sector gladly gave their time to give their evidence to the Review. Other organisations have both given evidence to the Panel and joined the Panel to help to arrive at the proposals contained in this report. Their knowledge and expertise proved invaluable.

It is clear that the Voluntary and Community Sector plays a vital role in Northampton in supporting those who, for whatever reason, need our help and support. It gives hundreds, if not thousands, of Northampton people the opportunity work voluntarily and it helps the volunteers to grow in capability and confidence whilst they do so.

The Councillor role is an important one and the Council’s Scrutiny process is a good place for Councillors to make a real difference. I believe that in this report the Panel has done that and I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my fellow Councillors for their work on this Panel.”

**Councillor David Garlick
Chair – Scrutiny Panel E**



- **Absence Management** – To evaluate the impact that staff absence has upon service delivery.

The recommendations of the Review included:-

- All Health and Wellbeing Policies are consistently considered across all Service areas within the Council
- An annual review of the implementation and consistency will be reported on through the Annual Equality Report.
- All Managers and Team Leaders should receive adequate and appropriate training and support on the Council's Absence Management Policies and Procedures.
- Refresher training is provided on a bi-annual basis and training on the Council's Absence Management Policies and Procedures be included in the Induction Programme for new Managers and Team Leaders.

"This Scrutiny Review thoroughly investigated the impact that staff absence has upon service delivery. The Panel was pleased to note that at the time of the Review, the Nurse-led system of reporting was still relatively new but it had proved to be well used especially with regards to the recent outbreak of flu."

Councillor Jane Hollis
Chair, Scrutiny Panel H



- **Neighbourhood Model** – To investigate which groups will be engaging with and who the Council will be working with.

The recommendations of the Review included:-

- A Workshop for all ward Councillors to be held, with the purpose to discuss the best use of resources in respect of the public meetings or other methods, alternative methods of engaging the public within the Neighbourhood Model be introduced by 1st October 2011
- In each area a minimum level of least two public meetings per year or equivalent alternative methods
- Officer Boards be redesignated Area Boards and ward Councillors and chairs or representatives of Parish Councils and Residents' Associations be invited to also attend
- A budget of £4,000 pa for 2011/12/13 for the publicity of public engagement events be granted
- The Head of Public Protection, in conjunction with the Chair of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP), introduce mechanisms that enable Area Action Plans to complement and enhance identified Community Safety priorities for the area

“ Overview and Scrutiny has over the past year carried out some very high profile pre-decision and post decision scrutiny, in addition to its in-depth Review work. I was pleased to be appointed Vice-Chair to Scrutiny Panel R&P (Neighbourhood Model). The Scrutiny Panel carried out a comprehensive Review over a short time frame and came to some very positive conclusions and recommendations in relation to how the Council should work with Community Groups”.

Councillor Lee Mason
Vice Chair, Scrutiny Panel R&P



- **Lease between Northampton Borough Council and Northampton Town Football Club and the contractual arrangements between Northampton Town Football Club and the Rugby and Northampton Athletics Club** – To review the operation of the lease that Northampton Borough Council has with Northampton Town Football Club, the contractual arrangements between Northampton Town Football Club and the Rugby and Northampton Athletics Club, and make recommendations for improvement to the facility, if appropriate.

The recommendations of the Review included:-

- Instructing officers to enforce, as is legally possible, all obligations that Northampton Town Football Club has under the Lease in respect of the condition of the athletics facility
- To explore all opportunities with Northampton Town Football Club, taking into consideration the reasonable representations of the Rugby and Northampton Athletics Club, regarding changes to the Lease structure
- To communicate with Northampton Town Football Club to require that it takes all necessary steps in the ongoing management of the athletics facility and in-field to help prevent damage to the Track and athletics equipment.
- To write to Northampton Town Football Club asking that, as a gesture of goodwill and positive intent, it agrees to permit athletics participants and spectators to park near to the Athletics Track when using the facilities and operating a security regime in co-operation with Rugby and Northampton Athletics Club that facilitates this

- To explore with Northampton Town Football Club, the potential opportunities for educational establishments, Leisure Trust and other such bodies, entering into an agreement with NTFC for the overall management of the athletics facility
- To write to Northampton Town Football Club requiring that it ensures that the athletics infield is made available to organisations hiring the facility for the purpose of athletics training and competition. Football training should continue to be permitted on the infield as well as making it a dual purpose facility. Equipment should be removed at the end of all training sessions and competitions by all parties utilising the facility.

“This Scrutiny Review demonstrates a first class example of non-Executives taking on board the concerns of a Local Athletics Club. A representative of the local Athletics Club addressed full Council expressing their concerns regarding the Lease arrangements for the athletics track. As a result, I, the Vice Chair of the O&S Committee, requested that this issue be reviewed by O&S. Both the Athletics Club and the Football Club were involved in the Review process. It will be interesting to see how much progress is made when O&S reviews the recommendations in six months time.

**Councillor John Yates
Chair
Scrutiny Panel H.**



What are our Challenges for 2011-2012?

- To build on O&S' achievements by setting stretching targets to broaden our impact. An example would be by increasing pre-decision scrutiny activities year on year.
- To continue to ensure that the work of O&S has a positive effect on decision-makers and provide evidence that it has made a real difference. Recommendations made in 2010-11 will be monitored and their impact reported on in 2011-12 Annual Report.
- To increase public participation in O&S at Northampton by increased public suggestions for scrutiny Review and increased attendance at O&S Committee and Panel meetings.



Glossary of Terms

Call-In

The process by which the O&S Committee considers whether a decision is properly taken or is the right decision.

Cabinet (Executive)

The Executive body responsible for day-to-day running of the Council and the development of policy. Cabinet Members have portfolios or areas of responsibility (e.g. Housing) for which they take executive decisions.

Councillor (Member)

An elected local representative on the Council, a Councillor represents the interests of the people who live in their ward and Northampton as a whole

Pre-decision Scrutiny:

O&S may inform Executive decisions on topics on the Forward Plan by making evidence based recommendations or advice prior to formal decision by the Executive.

Review

A study led by Scrutiny Councillors on a current issue, selected by the Committee. It aims to identify areas of good as well as poor practice, compare performance with other councils' countrywide, and challenge existing practice where relevant

The Review will lead to recommendations for improvements to relevant Cabinet Members as well as outside agencies, such as health trusts. While these are not obliged to support the recommendations, effective consultation has been proven to lead to consensus and to Cabinet support for reviews undertaken.

Contact details for more information

Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, is always very happy to speak to local people about the activities of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. If you have any comments or queries, or would like to suggest areas which may be appropriate topics for future work, you can speak to her by calling 01604 837408 or by emailing ttiff@northampton.gov.uk.

You can view recent agendas and minutes on the Council's website at www.northampton.gov.uk or by contacting Democratic Services democraticservices@northampton.gov.uk.

Overview and Scrutiny has its own dedicated website within the Council's website. The current work of Overview and Scrutiny and the reports already published are available on this site. The address is www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny



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