

Report of the
Overview & Scrutiny
Committees

Annual Report

2009/2010



NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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a message from

Councillor John Yates, Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

This Overview and Scrutiny Committees Annual Report published by Northampton Borough Council's gives a summary of the Committees' activities over the past twelve months and maps out its plans for the forthcoming year. The summaries from some other important published reports are also contained within this Annual Report.

I am sure that some of the Overview and Scrutiny recommendations have had a significant influence on Council policy, in terms of both holding the Council's Cabinet to account and contributing to both policy development and the well-being of Northampton citizens.

This report is exceptional in the way that it includes monitoring work that refers to Scrutiny reports dating back to 2006. This was due to the lack of Scrutiny monitoring during late 2007 and early 2008 when a backlog of the monitoring regime was created.

Progress made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees over the last year and work to develop the role even further are also included.

A self-evaluation of the Overview and Scrutiny function at Northampton was completed in January 2009, with support from Local Government peers. The evaluation had some very positive outcomes and acknowledged the achievements made in Overview and Scrutiny, some of which have been noted as examples of best practice. Suggested challenges and areas for improvement were the subject of debate at an Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan workshop; leading to the adoption of an Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan in July 2009. The need to review the structure of Overview and Scrutiny was identified at the same time, with a view to ensuring that the Improvement Plan could be delivered within available resources. This was pursued through workshops to which all Councillors were invited.

There was consensus at the workshop that the proposed structure for Overview and Scrutiny should have:

- One Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Three standing Scrutiny Panels:-
Housing, Regeneration & Planning and Environment.

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee supported the recommendations of the workshop. The Council's Constitution Working Group is currently investigating the way forward for a new Overview and Scrutiny structure.

It will report its findings to a full Council meeting in Spring 2010. It is expected that the new Overview and Scrutiny structure will come into force from May 2010.



Councillor John Yates
Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee



1. Introduction

1.1. What is Overview and Scrutiny?

Overview and Scrutiny is about Councillors working with the public to make sure that the Borough Council is making improvements to services to improve the quality of life for all in Northampton.

How does Overview and Scrutiny work at Northampton?

There are three Overview and Scrutiny Committees in Northampton that mirror the Cabinet Portfolios. In addition there is an Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee - one of its duties is to approve the annual work programme.

Overview and Scrutiny Structure



The Overview and Scrutiny Committees set up in depth investigations, known as Reviews; often into poor performing or developing areas.

The Reviews of specific issues are either undertaken by the Committee or a Task and Finish Group. The Task and Finish Groups continue to be a successful feature of Northampton's Overview and Scrutiny process, a number of which have been recognised as examples of best practice.

Following an in-depth Review, a report for Cabinet and /or full Council is produced, together with any recommendations for improvement and is forwarded to Cabinet and/or full Council through the pre-decision scrutiny process. If this report and recommendations are accepted by Cabinet and become actions they are closely monitored by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The views of Overview and Scrutiny are forwarded to Cabinet and/or full Council.

In all that it does, Overview and Scrutiny continues to have regard to the Centre for Public Scrutiny's principles of effective scrutiny: -

- Making an impact on service delivery
- Providing effective challenge
- Reflecting the voice and concerns of the Public
- Taking the Lead and Owning the Scrutiny process



Call-In of Cabinet decisions

Cabinet makes key decisions for the Council. Other Councillors play a role in overseeing these decision processes that affect more than two Wards and/or involve more than £50,000. It requires two Councillors to “Call-In” a decision made at a Cabinet meeting, within three working days of the minutes being published.

When a decision is 'called-in' the Overview and Scrutiny Committee examines the decision to ensure that it was made in the correct way and used robust information. Overview and Scrutiny may recommend that Cabinet or full Council should reconsider the decision.

Overview and Scrutiny may also be consulted by Cabinet on forthcoming decisions and the development of policy.

Appreciative Inquiry

A Group of Overview and Scrutiny Councillors work with the relevant Service area providing an input into an issue that is being currently reviewed by the Council.



Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Management Committee



2. Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

2.1 Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee 2009/2010



**Councillor
John Yates**
(Chair)



**Councillor
David Garlick**
(Vice Chair)



**Councillor
Ifty Choudary**



**Councillor
Jamie Lane**



**Councillor
Christopher Malpas**



**Councillor
Pam Varnserry**

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee co-ordinates and manages the work of the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Its other roles include

- Co-ordinating work programmes
- Allocation of resources
- Allocating areas of responsibility in cases of doubt
- Re-allocation of areas of responsibility in the event of changes to Cabinet Portfolios
- Involvement of other people in Overview and Scrutiny process
- Training and Development needs for Overview and Scrutiny Councillors
- Publicising the work of Overview and Scrutiny both within the Council and externally to the public and external organisations
- Evaluating the performance against the four main principles of Overview and Scrutiny



Overview and Scrutiny making a difference

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

During 2009/10 the Overview and Scrutiny has improved:

- Eight Scrutiny Reviews were conducted, which resulted in a number of recommendations to Cabinet. Further details are given in later sections of this Annual Report.
- Two further Reviews investigated the Overview and Scrutiny process in detail, the outcome of which was the production of the Improvement Plan. Around 50% of the actions have already been implemented which led to a Review of the Scrutiny structure recommended for the future.
- 91.5% of Scrutiny Review recommendations were accepted by Cabinet. The outcome of some Reviews is awaited, details of which will be provided in next year's annual report
- Improved Systems and processes have been introduced to support the Overview and Scrutiny process, such as:
 - Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan
- A Workshop was held that involved key partners, Cabinet members, Directors and Heads of Service, to put forward suggested issues for inclusion on next year's Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

- There were four Call-In Hearings, which showed that the decision-making process is transparent and open to challenge
- The introduction of a dedicated four year rolling training programme for non-Executive Councillors
- A training session on Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton was held for Officers
- Overview and Scrutiny dedicated part of its scheduled meetings to budget consultation and provided comment on the Council's draft budget
- Overview and Scrutiny supports the Council's five priorities and underpinning commitments and a lot of scrutiny work is developed around these priorities.



Why is effective Overview and Scrutiny important?

The role of the Northampton's Overview and Scrutiny Committees and their Task and Finish Groups is to look at services provided to citizens. Scrutiny is a statutory service and a key part of the Council's structure, which works to ensure that services are delivered efficiently, effectively and in the best interests of Northampton residents.

Overview and Scrutiny adds value because through it, Councillors can devote time to in-depth Reviews and Inquiries.

Overview and Scrutiny also provides an opportunity for the public and other stakeholders to access, influence and inform the work of the Council.

Overview and Scrutiny supports the Council's five priorities and underpinning commitments and a lot of Scrutiny work is developed around these priorities. The Council's five priorities and underpinning commitments are:

- We will help our communities become safer, greener and cleaner
- We will improve housing and health to enhance the well-being of our communities
- We will be a well-managed organisation that puts our customers at the heart of what we do
- We will promote economic development and growth in Northampton
- We will strengthen our commitment to partnership working and engaging with our communities to deliver better outcomes

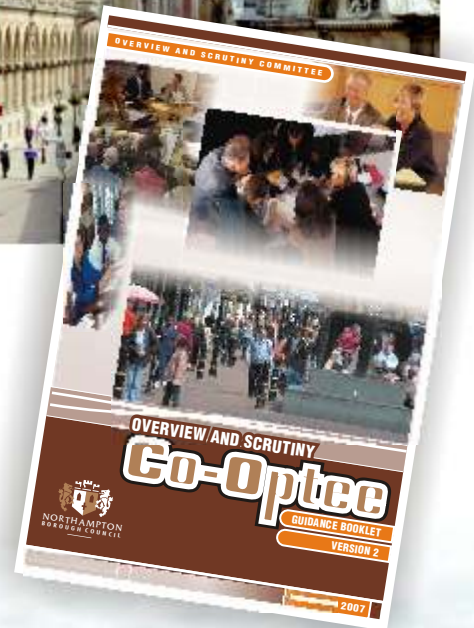


How the public can get involved in Northampton's Overview and Scrutiny

All Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings are held in public. Members of the public have the opportunity to address the Committee on an agenda item or may prefer to attend and listen to the debate.

Information about Overview and Scrutiny meetings taking place can be found on Northampton Borough Council's website, or by contacting the Scrutiny Officer.

Overview and Scrutiny aims to be as inclusive as possible and members of the public are able to submit their views on a particular topic for consideration and inclusion onto the work programme.



Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Achievements and Activities

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee has overall responsibility for co-ordinating, managing and developing the scrutiny process.

The Committee introduced a number of changes as part of an ongoing process of review and development, which aims to ensure that Overview and Scrutiny is continually improved.

During 2009/10 the delivery of Overview and Scrutiny in Northampton has improved. Key achievements and activities from 2009/10 are detailed below.

Key Achievements and Activities

during 2009/2010

- The adoption of the Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan following the evaluation of the Overview and Scrutiny process
- The adoption of a four year rolling training programme for Overview and Scrutiny Councillors
- A training programme on Overview and Scrutiny for Officers took place during November 2009
- The first annual “event” with partners, Portfolio Holders, Council Leader, senior officers in putting forward suggested priorities for inclusion in the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2010/2011
- A proposed new Overview and Scrutiny structure to be introduced from May 2010

The completion of an in-depth Review To investigate the facilities for older children and young adults and what further facilities and activities are required

Praise for Overview and Scrutiny

Overview and Scrutiny processes, procedures and documents have been commended recently:

- **Overview and Scrutiny Review Contaminated Water - 2008**
The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) refers to this report in its training sessions with Local Authorities as a good example of how there can be co-ordination between Councils in addressing an issue that crosses authority boundaries and the efforts that were made to engage with the public, both as a Council and by individual Members. The CfPS commented that ` *“The fact that it was focussed and quick is also a plus from a training perspective. There are increasing opportunities for there to be cross-border Overview and Scrutiny Reviews, particularly with CAA and the CfPS is asked questions on how this can be done.”*
- **Overview and Scrutiny Review Allotments (Water Charges) 2006**
The CfPS continues to inform Local Authorities of the example of the Allotments (Water Charges) Review and how it was suggested by the public, through full Council, as an example of good practice.



Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Continued

Praise for Overview and Scrutiny

The CfPS notes how the public was involved in the investigation and report back. Information on this Review and the Contaminated Water Review will be provided by the CfPS to South West Council's Scrutiny Members in further training sessions.

- **Suggest an Item for Scrutiny**

The CfPS has commented that it will use this questionnaire as an example of good practice at its training session with South West Council's Scrutiny Members.

- **Centre for Public Scrutiny Report - Global Challenge, Local Solutions: (2009)**

the role of scrutiny, audit and inspection in tackling the recession

The scrutiny review undertaken by Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 (Partnerships, Regeneration, Community Safety and Engagement) was referred to in the Centre for Public Scrutiny's report - Global Challenge, Local Solutions: the role of scrutiny, audit and inspection in tackling the recession.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny commented: -

"This review looked at work undertaken by West Northants Development Corporation (WNDC) in the context of the recession. WNDC was established as a result of disappointing CPA results for Northampton several years ago, to take on some important economic development and regeneration functions. The review focused on services being

delivered through partnerships both partnership between the council and the WNDC, and other local bodies.

Recommendations were developed which focused on WNDC being more proactive about joint working, and the council developing more capacity to enhance development control (planning services). A recommendation for a clear vision, backed up by a strong Local Development Framework, is a part of this. Comparative information from other parts of the country was collected and analysed to formulate recommendations.

By looking at similar development corporations (there are three others nationwide), the committee were able to make recommendations, which it knew were realistic, and stood a better chance of resulting in positive change. Assessment, on the basis of the above, of the way in which partnership arrangements centred on economic development might need to change to meet the challenge of the recession. Recommendations stated that partnerships' individual and collective priorities should alter.

Overall outcome

The review recommended that the WNDC should now "pump prime and encourage development in difficult economic times, rather than over-develop". This is an important finding, which has implications beyond the terms of this review alone it indicates how scrutiny can recommend that organisations and their priorities can and should change in the context of the recession. Many of these issues relate to funding."



Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan

The comprehensive Evaluation of Overview and Scrutiny Review assessed the performance of Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton using the Centre for Public Scrutiny's (CfPS) framework. Following this an external Scrutiny Peer facilitated a workshop, the outcome of which was the production of the Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan. A number of the actions have either been implemented or are scheduled for implementation over the next few months.

Achievements

- The improvement Plan demonstrates Scrutiny's value to auditors and inspectors by:
 - Encouraging involvement in the process of those being scrutinised
 - Communicating the potential of Scrutiny to local communities
 - Building confidence of those undertaking Scrutiny activities
- The development of an annual event to prioritise issues for inclusion in the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme
- Portfolio Holders were involved in the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programming process to inform non-Executives of early identification of policy priorities, any legislative changes that will affect the services provided by the Council will enable early policy development.
- A process has been introduced inviting members of the public to submit items for scrutiny. Six issues were suggested for inclusion on next year's Work Programme.

- Overview and Scrutiny Councillors promoted the Suggest an Item for Scrutiny form asking the public to suggest issues for inclusion on the Work Programme at a number of Neighbourhood Partnership meetings.
- The local press widely publicised the Suggest an Item for Scrutiny form asking the public to suggest issues for inclusion on the Work Programme by regular news bulletins and an article in the local paper.
- Overview and Scrutiny has been added to the web site A-Z under both O and S.

Challenges include:

- Endeavouring to hold some meetings in community venues, as oppose to Council offices, dependent upon the issue being reviewed.
- All members of Overview and Scrutiny Committees should be encouraged to make regular use of the scrutiny web pages on the Council's web site which highlight much of the good practice in existence in Northampton.



Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Suggested Changes include:

- The proposed new Overview and Scrutiny structure will include names for each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees rather than numbers that will easily identify their remit
- Build upon the Task and Finish Group questioning practice to add structure to the questioning process
- Utilise more widely the existing arrangements for incorporating experts or other elected members with a knowledge or expertise relevant to the subject of the review. In support of this, a survey is undertaken to ascertain elected members special interests or expertise other than obvious Council activities.

Northamptonshire Countywide Scrutiny Board

Work has continued with the County Council and the other District Councils in Northamptonshire on the Countywide Scrutiny Board. The Terms of Reference for the Board were produced by a five-member Constitution Working Group proved to be a useful forum, and provided much encouragement for cross-organisational scrutiny work in the future.

Councillor Jamie Lane was a member of this Working Group and the Council's Scrutiny Officer was also involved in the production of the draft Terms of Reference.

The Northamptonshire Overview and Scrutiny Board approved the Terms of Reference at its meeting in January 2010 and requested that the terms of reference be considered by all the members of the Countywide Scrutiny Board. The Northamptonshire Overview and Scrutiny Board derives its authority from the member organisations. Therefore there is a need for each member organisation to approve the Terms of Reference. Authority comes from various areas of the member organisations, which are all set up in different ways. The powers to require attendance are included in the Terms of Reference.

There is a clear commitment to avoid the use of this power, wherever possible, as this is not the spirit in which the Board was set up.

Northampton Borough Council's Cabinet resolved to recommend to full Council that the Terms of Reference for the Northamptonshire Countywide Scrutiny Board be approved.

Review - More Facilities for Older Children

At the town's Balloon Festival in August 2008, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee asked the public to suggest issues for inclusion onto the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme. The public suggested many issues and from these the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee selected the top ten issues.

At the Local Democracy Week event held at the Guildhall in October 2008, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee held a ballot for an item for inclusion onto its Work Programme.

The item with the most votes was More Facilities for Older Children.



Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee



Three co-optees joined the Overview and Scrutiny Review, representing Northamptonshire County Council's Children and Young People's Services, Connexions and Northampton's Voluntary Youth Association. The Youth Forum was also very active in the Review helping to obtain evidence from a variety of sources.

This in-depth Review concluded its findings in December 2009 and Cabinet received the report at its meeting on 10 February 2010.

Key Findings include:

- There are many facilities and activities currently available for young people, aged 13-19 years old. A lot of activities and facilities are available but not everyone is aware of their existence.
- There needs to be clear communication channels promoting the activities and facilities that are available, such as youth websites, leaflets and notice boards.
- Many of the facilities and activities are located on the outskirts of Northampton. Travelling across town to some events can be problematic for some young people and all day activities would be welcomed.
- The Neighbourhood Partnership areas have a lot of activities available for youngsters who have been 'in trouble'. The evidence provided from the Lead Neighbourhood Partnership Co-ordinator stated that there is, however, a lack of provision aimed at giving youngsters from deprived areas the range of experience and aspirations that middle class children often take for granted.
- The majority of the known available activities and facilities that are offered are used by approximately 65.5% mixed gender. Around 4% is attended by just females and 5.5% attended by males only. It is often dependent upon the activity as to the gender attendance,
- There is limited information collated regarding after school facilities and the use of school sites outside the curriculum.
- Just over twenty five per cent of known activities are provided free of charge to young people in the age bracket investigated by this Overview and Scrutiny Review. Of the nine activities and facilities offered through Extended Services, eight are offered on a paid for basis, and one is free of charge although an optional donation is suggested.
- Available buildings are an important feature for activities and facilities for young people, such as cafes and open spaces for training.
- It is evident that if the facility or activity is free and is widely publicised, young people are more likely to partake.
- There is a limited number of youth clubs in Northampton. Some Community Association buildings have closed their youth sections due to staffing shortages



Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Continued

- Games and activities that are planned for young people work well.
- Young people indicated that they would like more facilities to be provided. More youth clubs were a popular suggestion as was further leisure facilities such as a recreation ground with a graffiti wall.
- The GAP analysis of facilities/activities (recreational, social and cultural) available for 13-19 year olds, including those with special education needs and those with disabilities up to the age of 25. However it identified that there are a lot of facilities available but young people have identified that more need to be provided free of charge or affordable to all. Just over 25% of the known activities are provided free of charge.
- In some areas community buildings are available but there is a lack of adult supervision available for young peoples' activities. Some Faith Communities indicated that they have available accommodation for activities for young people.
- There is a need for a variety of communication methods, such as a youth website, leaflets and notice boards. Sport for Youth, run by Sports Development, gives young people a platform on sport facilities - not just on sports facilities but also for activities, funding projects and anything related to Sport in Northampton.

Key Outcomes

- The Review demonstrated good joint working with local partners
- The Review was undertaken as a result of the public's expressing the opinion that this subject matter should be scrutinised
- The outcomes of the recommendations are not yet known as Cabinet's response to the report is expected in the spring 2010

Dedicated four year rolling training programme for non-Executive Councillors

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee approved a dedicated four-year rolling training programme for non-Executive Councillors.

Key Outcomes

- The aim of the training programme is to ensure that non-Executives are kept fully up to speed with developments within Overview and Scrutiny



Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Training session on Overview and Scrutiny for Officers

A whole day seminar for Heads of Service and Managers took place in the autumn 2009 and covered:

- 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".

Key Outcomes

- Staff that attended the training have a good understanding of Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton.

Developments in Overview and Scrutiny

Scrutiny of Crime and Disorder

The Police and Justice Act 2006 made a provision for a wide range of changes to the way in which Community Safety Partnerships fulfil their responsibilities in relation to tackling crime, disorder and substance misuse in their locality. These changes include the requirement that Local Authorities' Scrutiny structures should consider crime and disorder matters, and came to force on the 1 of October 2009.

The Constitution Working Group is looking at proposals for a way forward.

Councillor Call for Action (CCfA)

In 2008, Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 suggested a pilot process for Councillor Call for Action (CCfA). This process was accepted by Cabinet. The Constitution Working Group is currently updating the constitution and will be looking to including the Council's Councillor Call for Action process into the constitution.

When it has not proved possible to resolve a matter in any other forum the Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) provides an opportunity for a councillor to raise an issue at a meeting of one of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees. It provides an opportunity for a matter to be discussed in a public forum and will augment the Council's overview and scrutiny role.



Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Although no CCfAs have been logged as yet, Councillors are aware of the process and the Scrutiny Officer is ready and willing to assist.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny published a document on CCfA-

Action stations? The first six months of the Councillor Call for Action which can be located on its website www.cfps.org.uk. This publication takes stock six months after the Act came into force. It looks at the work that councils have been doing to see if the Councillor Call for Action has been useful and if the barriers that have been identified are justified. This document also provides some practical tips for enhancing the way that local authorities and their partners approach CCfA.

Overview and Scrutiny Bill

The recent Local Authorities (Overview and Scrutiny) Bill aims to strengthen and broaden the powers of local government Overview and Scrutiny Committees. It has successfully passed through the report stage on 12 March 2010. A date for the Third Reading has not been set and it appears that the Bill is unlikely to be passed before the general election 2010. However, with both Government and opposition support for improved scrutiny powers, it is expected to be an issue revisited in the next parliament.

The main terms of the Bill:

- Give Scrutiny Committees powers over a wider range of external bodies than at present (the external bodies will be designated by regulation)
- Provide for these powers to be used in scrutiny of activities carried out by these external bodies that relate to matters of local concern in the provision of public services
- Make provision to ensure that Scrutiny Officers are allocated such resources as they believe required to carry out their role effectively

District Councils are excluded from the new powers.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) supports the Bill and has commented that even if it does not make it into law, it will continue to lobby on the positive proposals contained in it to ensure they remain on the agenda.

Overview and Scrutiny Work Programming Workshop

A key component of the Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan was to hold an event to produce the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2010/2011:

Hold an annual "event" with partners, Portfolio Holders, Council Leader, senior officers, Voluntary Organisations invite or brief the Press. Short presentations from Executive Members supported by Officers on priorities and challenges including departmental Service Plans. Also consider targets to and inspection reports to identify areas of weakness.

The event was held on Thursday 11 March 2010.

Prior to the event a pack was issued to all Councillors containing relevant background information. The Chief Executive opened this event and the Directors and some Heads of Service attended to provide assistance to Councillors in suggesting issues to review.

The Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan detailed the need to involve the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holders in Overview and Scrutiny Work Programming. Therefore, Cabinet Members were invited to attend the event to inform of their priorities and objectives for the year. The



Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Leader of the Council provided a summary of Cabinet's priorities and objectives. Along with other Portfolio Holders, the Leader provided further information as required to the workshop on these issues.

Councillor Christopher Long, Chair of the Northamptonshire Countywide Joint Scrutiny Board, attended and shared information on the current and proposed work of the Board.

Another key element of the Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan is in respect of understanding Scrutiny:

“(a) Need to raise the profile of scrutiny, both in and outside the Guildhall. Officers and public need a greater understanding of scrutiny.”

Officer training has taken place around the role of Overview and Scrutiny.

A short survey was sent to all Directors to circulate to staff within their directorate. The survey asked for views, from an internal perspective, on the issues that Overview and Scrutiny should be looking at.

Copies of a Suggestions form requesting issues that Overview and Scrutiny should be looking at were circulated by Councillors at their Neighbourhood Partnership meetings.

A press release was also issued about the 'request for issues' to help aid promotion.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny has acknowledged the importance of this survey and made comments on its content

Councillors present at the workshop, in Groups, supported by a Director and a Head of Service, put forward suggested issues for inclusion on next year's Overview and Scrutiny work programme. Cabinet Members also sat with the Groups to provide points of clarity, as requested, on their priorities and objectives for 2010/11.

Scrutiny Activity for Next year

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee at its last meeting of the Municipal Year finalised the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2010/2011. It identified the following issues for inclusion:

- Leisure Strategic Business Review
- Pre-decision Scrutiny: Procurement (Market Testing) of Environmental Services
- Neighbourhood Model
- Northamptonshire Alcohol Strategy
- Independent Living Strategies
- Proposals for Cliftonville House
- Commissioning Framework for the Third Sector

Deferred Issues for Potential Review

- Choice Based Lettings (CBL)
- New Tenancy Agreement
- Absence Management

Key Outcomes

- The Centre for Public Scrutiny acknowledged the importance of our Scrutiny Work Programme Suggestion form, commenting on its content.
- The Chair of the Northamptonshire Countywide Scrutiny Board attended the event, sharing details of the Board's draft work programme.
- An inclusive work programme for 2010/2011, taking into consideration the views of the public, key corporate priorities & challenges and targets to and inspection reports to identify areas of weakness has been produced.



Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

What are the future challenges for Overview and Scrutiny?

Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)

Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) will replace Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). CAA will look at the public services in an area delivered by councils and their partners, including the private and voluntary sector. CAA aims to be more relevant to local people by focussing on issues that are important to their community. It will also develop a shared view about the challenges facing an area, such as crime, community cohesion, a sustainable environment or public health issues and will also create a more joined up and proportionate approach to public service regulation.

Local Area Agreements Round 2 (LAA2)

Local Area Agreements (LAAs) set out the priorities for a local area agreed between central government and the local authority, Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and other key partners at a local level. LAAs simplify some central funding, help join up public services more effectively and allow greater flexibility for local solutions to local issues.

Councillor Call for Action (CCfA)

Through Councillor Call for Action (CCfA), the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 enables Councillors to refer a local matter to Scrutiny. The Act became

legislation in Spring 2009 and the measure, CCfA, is aimed to help Councillors raise matters on an Authority's agenda on behalf of their constituents where all usual courses of action have failed to resolve the matter. It will be up to Overview and Scrutiny to determine whether or not to hold a Scrutiny enquiry into the issue and respond.

Ward Councillors play a central role in the life of a Local Authority as a channel for discussion between the Council and its citizens and as a champion for local concerns. To strengthen Councillors' ability to carry out this role, the Government has enacted, in the Local Government and Public Involvement and Health Act 2007, section 119, provisions for a CCfA.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 also makes provision in section 236 for Councils to delegate some of its functions to individual Councillors to allow them to make decisions at a ward level, which will bring real improvements to their local areas.

Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan

Following the evaluation of Overview and Scrutiny, the Improvement Plan will aim to make changes to the Overview and Scrutiny process at Northampton to ensure it continues to improve and make a difference to the citizens of Northampton.

A workshop for Overview and Scrutiny Councillors has been set for Spring 2009 to agree an Improvement Plan for the service.



Overview & Scrutiny Committee

1

Partnerships, Regeneration, Community Safety and Engagement



Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1

Partnerships, Regeneration, Community Safety and Engagement

welcome from

Councillor John Yates, Chair, Overview and Scrutiny 1

The Committee has had another very busy year completing a number of detailed and productive Overview and Scrutiny Reviews, covering issues of high importance both locally and nationally. One Call-In Hearing was held and the Committee considered a number of briefings on issues within its remit.

The Committee has continued to monitor progress on existing Overview and Scrutiny Reviews to make sure that accepted recommendations have been implemented.

The Committee has also continued to look regularly at how the Council performs against national and local performance indicators for partnerships, regeneration, community safety and engagement.

The work of the Committee over the past year has attracted interest from the local press and one occasion details were reported in the national press.

I would like to thank members of **Overview and Scrutiny Committee (1) Regeneration, Planning, Community Engagement and Safety** for sitting on this Committee during its busy year.

I would also like to thank Cabinet Members, Officers, stakeholders and members of the public who have contributed so positively to the debates and Reviews.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Yates', written over a horizontal line.

**Councillor
John Yates
Chair, Overview
and Scrutiny
Management Committee**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

Key achievements and activities

The agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 seeks to examine and influence policies under its remit of regeneration, planning, community safety and engagement.

Reviews

Reviews for 2009/2010 included:

Scrutiny of the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy

Cabinet resolved that the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy be referred to Overview and Scrutiny for immediate scrutiny with a view to bringing a report to full Council in September 2009. Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 agreed to this request and invited all Members of the Council to have an input into the Review, which was held over three meetings during August 2009. The purpose of the Review was to recommend to full Council, Northampton Borough Council's formal response to the consultation on the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy.

Due to the short timescale available to undertake this Review, it was acknowledged that the Committee could not undertake a full comprehensive piece of scrutiny work. It therefore identified four key issues contained in the Emergent Joint Core Strategy to be examined on a very strategic level:

- The Consultation Process
- Visions/Options
- Impact on Northampton
 - Sustainable urban growth
 - Regeneration
- Delivery of Infrastructure

Key findings included:

- From the evidence gathered by the Committee it was apparent that there is an excess of flatted accommodation within the town and that no further such accommodation is required, there is, however, a need for more family homes. The figure of 35% affordable housing was felt to be appropriate by the Committee.
 - The Committee strongly believed the six-week consultation period to be inadequate and would have recommended that the period should be extended.
 - Further consultation periods should avoid key holiday periods.
 - Exhibitions should be held at times when working people can also attend
 - Use is made of fixed exhibitions at key venues in the town such as the Grosvenor Centre.
- The Emergent Joint Core Strategy contained jargon and use of plain English should be recommended in future consultation documents.
- It would be beneficial to seek confirmation regarding the progress of Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk for Northampton before a full response to the Consultation is given.
- The lack of an Equality Impact Assessment for the Emergent Joint Core Strategy was acknowledged which could mean that the Emergent West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy might have an unintended adverse impact on any particular sector of the community.
- As an aspirational Vision - the Spatial Vision Where we want to be reflects what the Council would like to see for the town.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

- Following consideration of Option A and Option B in relation to the distribution of development, the Committee concluded that:
 - **Option B** - concentrates on developments in and around existing settlements.
 - **Option B** - was supported as development can be focused in a small number of large development areas
- The Emergent Joint Core Strategy needs to sit alongside plans for the rest of the County and this needs to be evidenced.
- Affordable housing should also take into consideration provision for older people. The current criteria set for affordable housing is very broad and requires challenging.
- There is a need to find a location for growth that will sustain the infrastructure.

Key Outcomes

- A copy of the Review report was forwarded to the West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit in response to the consultation process on the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy.



Concessionary Fares Appreciative Inquiry

The Appreciative Inquiry was tasked with the consideration, in conjunction with public consultation, of possible variations to the Concessionary Bus Travel Scheme currently operated by Northampton Borough Council. The setting up of the Appreciative Inquiry followed representations on variations being made to full Council in May 2008. Subsequently, the matter was referred to Cabinet by full Council (2 June 2008) and on to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 (25 June 2008).

The Appreciative Inquiry focused on a number of possible variations to the current concessionary scheme. The current scheme offers the concession to residents aged 60 and over and residents with eligible disabilities for free bus travel. The current scheme offers free bus travel between 9.30am and 11pm Mon-Fri and all day at weekends. At present, there is no provision for companions to travel free with disabled residents.

The Appreciative Inquiry completed its work in Autumn 2009 and reported its finding to Cabinet on 25 November 2009.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

Key findings included:

- The Consultants Report on the impact of potential changes principally provides a forecast or predication of resources required to implement the proposals. It has been modified in light of changing circumstances and forecasts, particularly in respect of policy changes elsewhere in Northamptonshire.
- The Consultation Survey of Bus Pass Users indicated a strong preference for all the proposed changes to be introduced and this has been reinforced by further consultation with the Councils Community Forums.
- The limited consultation with other Concessionary Travel Authorities needs to be seen in the context of being a random cross-section of authorities without a detailed look at travel patterns and other factors within these areas. In this sense, although the cross section have largely introduced discretionary elements into their schemes, the need for comparison within Northamptonshire is seen as more important to the exercise.
- The Department for Transport consultation on possible administrative changes has provided an important context for planning the future of the service. Whilst it is still at the consultative stage, the most likely outcome is transfer of responsibility to the County Council and their desire to have a clear scheme conforming to one set of rules. This need for conformity would apply, possibly with greater emphasis, were responsibilities to be transferred to regional or national level.
- Any change in the Authorities responsible for Concessionary Bus Travel will be subject to further consultation with Local Authorities by the Department for Transport and depending on the outcome, Legislation being enacted by Central Government.
- The need for a uniform scheme which is clear both to bus users and bus companies is emphasised by the introduction of an electronic recognition system on the buses, due to commence in Autumn 2009. The 'smartcard' technology is complex in its introduction and variations should be kept to a minimum
- A key preliminary study to this evidence is the Equality Impact Assessment, which has a fundamental influence on the forecasting of the impact of proposals.



Introduction of Companion Travel for eligible disabled pass-holders from other Northamptonshire districts

- The resource implication was estimated at £40,000 if introduced in 2010-11. A clear majority in the consultation survey (87%) were in favour of the proposal. Regarding a uniform scheme within the County, five districts have this discretionary element in place and its introduction in Northampton would reinforce this. The Equality Impact Assessment identified the non-inclusion of these elements of the scheme as a major barrier to achieving full equality within the scheme.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

Introduction of All-Day Free Travel: Monday-Friday

- The resource implications were forecasted as £386,000 if introduced in 2010-11. Lower estimates emerged from consultation with other authorities outside the County but there is a strong likelihood that the above estimate will be reached. The introduction of free all-day travel may attract claims for capital expenditure from bus operators, which could incur additional expenditure. A clear majority in the consultation survey (89%) were in favour of free travel before 9.30am.
- In terms of a uniform scheme within the County, four districts do not have this discretionary element in place and two further districts are reviewing a possible change away from the discretionary free all-day travel to the statutory position i.e. no free travel before 9.30am. The retention of the statutory scheme in Northampton would reinforce this majority of districts adhering to free travel only being offered after 9.30am.
- The Equality Impact Assessment identified the inclusion or non-inclusion of this element of the scheme as having no significant impact on achieving full equality within the scheme.
- The evidence of a random cross-section from other concessionary travel authorities differs from the County situation. Together with the strong findings for the proposal from the consultation survey and other representations it may prompt the need for further member consideration of the options.

Possible Charging for Replacement Bus Passes

- The resource implication of introducing a £10 charge (is estimated as an income to the authority of £12,000 per annum. A clear majority in the consultation survey (59%) were in favour of introducing a charge. In terms of a uniform scheme within the County, all other districts have a replacement charge in place and introduction in Northampton would reinforce this. It would also anticipate the administration of the scheme could possibly be carried out by the County Council in the future. The proposal would not impact on equality within the scheme and would improve the service in helping to reduce any fraudulent use of passes

Key Outcomes

- The Review was undertaken as a result of non-Executive's taking into consideration the public's concerns and comments around this issue.
- Cabinet accepted the report and its financial implications were considered as part of the budget consultation, the outcome of which was that the public agreed that grants to voluntary organisations should be maintained at their current level, no increases should be made to the hours of the Concessionary Bus Fare Scheme. (84% agreed that there should be no increases to the hours of concessionary bus fares, with 16% in disagreement).



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1



Community Centres

The Task and Finish Group, as a critical friend to Cabinet, undertook a Review to support the development of Policy for Community Centres in relation to:

- The provision of premises for community use, and
- The role of Northampton Borough Council in such provision
- To monitor any budget proposals in relation to community centres

Key findings

- The Task and Finish Group realises that there needs to be accessibility to community facilities for all Groups.
- Community Centres need to look like a Community Centre first and foremost and hirers should return it to that state when their session concludes.
- The Task and Finish Group highlighted the need for a stated percentage of the usage of Community Centres and the number of Groups hiring the Centre to be documented. It would be advantageous for a monitoring

- system to be introduced. Other performance related monitoring could be tailored on a case-by-case basis.
- The Task and Finish Group emphasised that 'one size does not fit all' and that each Community Centre needs to be looked at differently. When looking at any proposal for Community Centres, there is a need for clear Equal Opportunity Policies to ensure it is open to all. The Community Centre needs to be clearly signposted and look like a Community Centre. The responsibility and ownership of the building, together with booking details, should be clearly displayed on the outside of the Community Centre.

The Task and Finish Group had no objections to a specific Group, for example a Faith Group, taking on the management of a Community Centre but access has to be open to all and it has to be clearly labelled a Community Centre and not the Faith Group's Centre.

- If there is a dominant use of a Community Centre, it can change the perception to the rest of the Community of what the Centre is. Some Centres are known as 'the nursery' or 'play group'. The same could happen if a specific Group managed a Community Centre.
- The Task and Finish Group acknowledged the need for a clear Policy detailing specific categories for commercial and subsidised hire charges. Categories should comprise local Third Sector Groups, Third Sector Groups and Commercial Groups.
- The Task and Finish Group noted that one particular Community Centre is unique in the way that it pays for its own Coordinator.

The current fees and charges for Northampton Borough Council managed Community Centres do not appear to be



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

competitive. It is further realised, however, that there are occasions when the Council needs to subsidise some Groups, such as those known to be of low income.

- The Task and Finish Group felt that all commercial businesses should pay commercial rates for the hire of Community Centres.
- The Task and Finish Group highlighted that there is a huge difference in hire rates between Community Centres.
- The Task and Finish Group noted that the majority of Pre-School groups are being charged the community group rate for the hire of Community Centres and conveys its concerns about this charging regime. It has particular concerns, as often Pre-School groups appear to use Community Centres for their exclusion.
- The Task and Finish Group had particular concerns regarding the minimal usage at one Community Centre. Due to the fact that a pre-school uses this Community Centre during school hours it cannot be used after 3pm because the Pre-School leaves its kit in the Room. The Task and Finish Group felt that this Community Centre is a vital link with the community and it would be advantageous to ascertain whether the room is available for bookings after 3pm. It is further acknowledged that Community Centre is set out as a school.
- On its tour of the Community Centres, the Task and Finish Group was provided with examples that some bookings had been turned away. The Community often sees the Community Centre Coordinator as the contact for bookings but the Task and Finish Group realises that it is not within their' job description to take bookings. The need for the clear display of contact and booking arrangements was noted.
- The Task and Finish Group recognised the need for Centre Coordinators to have ownership of a Community Centre or a clusters of Community Centres.
- It is noted that arrangements for providing cover for some Community Centre Co-Ordinators is not consistent. The Task and Finish Group felt that weekends in particular are income-generating and that there is a need for cover to be provided. Community Centres should be available for seven days a week usage.
- It was queried why some public bodies were using venues such as Sixfields and Franklins Gardens for their meetings but not utilising Community Centres. Community Centres are not marketed and there is a strong need for this. Often the image of Community Centres is 'run down' not the ideal place to hold a meeting. The Task and Finish Group appreciates that there are no available resources to market Community Centres. There may be potential for considering the role of Centre Managers.
- It was realised that it is not just about acquiring bookings but also about how the Community Centre plays a role in the community, for example how the Community Centre supports the community. The Task and Finish Group concludes that at present, the Council's role in the management of Community Centres appears to be as a caretaker only.
- There is a need to explore the arrangements that the Council has with Management Committees to ascertain whether they require amendment and updating. It is apparent that many of the Legal Agreements are often decades old, most of which have expired.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

- On the tour of the Community Centres the Task and Finish Group was pleased to note that in the main the standard was high but it is felt that there is a lack of a maintenance schedule, such as painting of window frames. A number of the Community Centres were built a number of years ago and the Task and Finish Group felt that if there were more modern buildings, they would be easier to let and cheaper to run.
- The Task and Finish Group acknowledged the Council has recently approved a Corporate Asset Management Strategy, which recognises the benefits, which can accrue from Community Asset Transfers and is addressing the need for a policy to document its approach to such transfers. It emphasises the need for the Council to give support to organisations and Groups, such as help with business planning. Awaiting confirmation about this Review
- The need for the Council to give support to organisations and Groups, such as help with business planning was emphasised.
- From the evidence provided, the Task and Finish Group noted the comments that there is a need for more youth groups and youth activities. It was highlighted that Northampton Borough Council has nine community centres, only three of which host youth provision.
- The Task and Finish Group agreed that the Equality Impact Assessment for Community Centres is very comprehensive and the majority of areas are covered. There is a need to ensure that all buildings that the Council has direct or indirect input into have a clear Equality Standards Policy.

Recommendations included:-

- All leases for self managed Community Centres are reviewed to ensure that they meet consistent standards; based on a common core document. Leases be on a term of at least 25 years.
- In assessing the business cases, Management Committees must be able to demonstrate they are maintaining a local focus and provide evidence to support it can manage a number of Community Centres fitting the set criteria.
- Northampton Borough Council provides information, such as building surveys, details of running costs to Self Managed Community Centres to aid business planning.
- Management Committees are charged with ensuring that Community Centres are kept in a good state of repair. Northampton Borough Council provides an allocated sum of money to the Management Committees for general maintenance and repair of the Community Centres. Northampton Borough Council remains the budget holder for major repairs.
- Suitable Community Groups are given the opportunity to submit an application for the management of a Community Centre(s). Existing Management Committees are given first opportunity to submit proposals for community centre(s) that they currently manage.
- Where appropriate, Community Groups taking on the management role of the Community Centres, the Council or other partners provide a grant towards running costs, with the proviso that the Groups work in partnership with the Council to achieve community outcomes.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

- Northampton Borough Council works with Community Groups that take on the management of a Community Centre regarding the employment of a Centre Coordinator and/or Centre Manager.
- The Council works with Management Committees to ensure that the Community Centres meet the needs of the Community.
- A Policy, containing particular components such as an Equality Impact Assessment, Health and Safety issues, Terms of Access, booking and contact details to be clearly visible from the outside of the building, details of the condition in which the Community Centre should be left when the hirer has concluded its session, be introduced and issued to all Community Centres. The Policy is renewed on an annual basis.
- Monitoring of the management of Community Centres is introduced, using management tools.
- Cabinet considers, within appropriate resources, a method of promoting and marketing Community Centres.
- Centre Coordinators are responsible for a particular Community Centre/clusters of Community Centres to encourage ownership.
- Community Centres are available for hire seven days a week.
- A review of the fees and charges for Northampton Borough Council managed Community Centres is undertaken.
- New builds for Community Centres achieve the same standard, or better, of the design of the floor space, accessibility and layout of Parklands and Pastures Community Centres.

Key Outcomes

- This Review demonstrated Overview and Scrutiny, as a critical friend to Cabinet, supporting the development of Policy for Community Centres.
- Further outcomes not known. The report will be presented to Cabinet early in the Municipal Year 2010/2011.

Performance Monitoring

As part of the performance monitoring regime, the Chair and Vice Chair scrutinise the monthly Best Value Performance Indicators and request a report or further information on those that they feel need further investigation.

Over the year, Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 has investigated a number of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) that come within its remit:

- **BV170A - The number of visits to/usage of Local Authority funded or part funded museums per 1,000 population**
- **BV170B - The number of those visits to local authority funded or part funded museums that were in person per 1,000 population**
- **BV170C - The number of pupils visiting museums and galleries in organised school groups**

The Committee scrutinised BV170A, BV170B and BV170C ascertaining the impact of the budget savings, in particular to BV170B.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

Key Issues and Outcomes

- From April 2009 the Northampton Museum & Art Gallery and Abington Museum (NMAG) opening hours were changed. The result of which is the main museum on Guildhall Road closing on a Monday all year round, and Abington Museum closing on Tuesday's and Wednesday's April October, with complete closure to the public November February. Abington museum will continue to open on Bank Holiday Mondays throughout the summer.
- Access by school groups remains unaffected by these changes to public opening hours, and access by individual members of the public is still possible by prior appointment and subject to staff availability.
- The projected reduction in visitors represents an approximate 25% reduction in total visitor numbers 2009 2010. This represents a 16% reduction in visits at NMAG, and a 44% reduction at Abington; reflecting the changes in opening times at each site.
- The projected figure for BVPI 170b for 2009 10 is 671.3. The 'All England' minimum figure for remaining top quartile is 611, whilst the top quartile minimum compared to other District/Borough run museum services is 518. Northampton remains comfortably inside the top quartile performance.

BV126a - domestic burglaries per 1,000 households per Local Authority

Following on from its investigation into BV126 in 2009/10, the Committee had further concerns regarding this Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI). This resulted in a request for an in-depth report detailing how the data for BV126, domestic burglaries per 1,000 households per Local Authority, is collated and used.

Key Issues and Outcomes

- Figures are provided by Northamptonshire Police by day 10 of each month and are taken from the Northamptonshire Police West Performance Report, WN Northampton section.
- To calculate the cumulative overall performance to date, the Burglary Dwelling figure is divided by the number of households figure and multiplied by 1000. Calculation should be done to one decimal place.
- This data is further supported by a monthly strategic report produced by the ComPaSS Unit for the SSNP (Safer Stronger Northampton Partnership) Board and Business Support Group.
- From April 2008, burglary no longer stands alone but now falls within the new Home Office category of Serious Acquisitive Crime (NI 16). Northampton Borough Council will continue to monitor burglary through a local performance indicator.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1



Briefing Talking CCTV Cameras

The Committee received a comprehensive briefing note detailing the results of the evaluation of Talking CCTV cameras in Northampton, alongside details from some of the other towns that had Talking CCTV cameras in situ.

Key Outcomes

- The results from 2008/2009 had not been as positive as the previous year mainly due to the people being used to the automated, repetitive messages.
- From 1 May to 16 June 2009 there had been 120 talking messages issues of which 78 had positive results. These are no longer automated.
- Details of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 meeting that debated this issue were reported in both the local and national press.

Budget Consultation

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 took part in the Revenue Budget Consultation Process 2010/2013, making comment early on in the process.

Monitoring Process

The Committee monitored the following Overview and Scrutiny Review recommendations that had been accepted by Cabinet:

Historical Buildings and Regeneration Opportunities Task and Finish Group report

This Review came about due to the demolition of the Maltings and St Marks Church. The Task and Finish Group wanted to review the current powers and those of partner organisations that might be used to prevent the loss of further historic buildings in the town.

The Task and Finish Group made a number of recommendations including:

- Cabinet allocate additional resources to the conservation service
- That proposals be brought forward to map buildings that are of value but not listed buildings
- Bring forward proposals to adopt the secondary list of buildings
- Bring forward a report from officers on the new legislation and how it will be implemented
- Review the County Archaeological service
- Examine the feasibility of building a physical and computer model of Northampton central area



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

The response of Cabinet covered four principle areas.

Additional Staffing (a team of six officers)

Cabinet resolved to reject this recommendation for budgetary reasons.

Bring forward proposals to map buildings that are not currently listed buildings.

This is not currently being progressed due to a lack of resources.

The Council has an adopted 'local list' of buildings important to the town centre and a draft list covering the remainder of the Borough. There are currently 605 buildings included in the combined lists and each will require assessment to establish if they merit inclusion on the final adopted list. The adopted list will need to be robust in the event of challenge, particularly at appeal, and therefore it will be necessary to develop a mechanism for both assessment and evaluation.

Review County Archaeological advice

The lack of a Countywide Archaeological Advice Service is being actively addressed. A working group has been established with the remit of considering the options available to provide a full archaeological advice service. Following consideration of the possible options the County Chief Planning Officers group has agreed that the most cost effective way forward would be to adopt a countywide partnership approach to providing the service. The current proposal is for the Northamptonshire County Council to provide the Archaeology Service with a buy-in from Borough and District Councils enabling the County Council to strengthen the current archaeology team ensuring a quality service to those Boroughs and Districts, which participate in the scheme.

Examine the feasibility of building a physical and computer model of Northampton central area

It is accepted that a physical and computer model of the town centre would assist in understanding the context within which development proposals would sit. The key issue relating to this element is cost. A number of quotations were obtained for a physical model and a MTP bid for £25,000 was made for 2009/2010 to facilitate this. Due to financial constraints the bid was unsuccessful.

Key Outcomes

- Cabinet accepted four of the six recommendations contained in the report
- The establishment of a Working Group that has the remit of considering the options available to provide a full archaeological advice service to actively address the lack of a County wide archaeological advice service.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

Councillor Call for Action (CCfA)

A Task and Finish Group was set up to look at the way forward for this Council prior to the Legislation being implemented. The Task and Finish Group proposed a pilot scheme for CCfA, which was a real opportunity for Overview and Scrutiny to be involved in policy development for the Council.

CCfA became a statutory instrument on 1 April 2010 but the Protocol for using this has not been formally adopted. However, the Constitution Working is currently considering this document and the section for inclusion in the Council's Constitution.

Key Outcomes

- Overview and Scrutiny was involved in policy development for the Council
- The CCfA Protocol and section for inclusion in the Council's constitution have been drafted and are being considered by the Constitution Working Group
- A training package for Councillors on Scrutiny of Crime and Disorder and CCfA is being considered by the Councillor Development Group

Call-in

Call In - Leisure and Sport Strategic Business Review - Management Options Appraisal -

The decision of Cabinet in relation to the Leisure and Sport Strategic Business Review - Management Options Appraisal was called-in for Scrutiny on the grounds that:

- 1) *Lack of any Pre Scrutiny*
- 2) *Lack of Public Consultation despite the paper being prepared and written before and during the period of the Council's Public Consultation on the 2010- 2011 Budget and the Council Corporate Plan*
- 3) *Lack of Complete Legal Advice*
- 4) *Lack of an Equalities Impact Assessment on the outcome of the report*
- 5) *Lack of proper consultation with non-cabinet members of the Council*

The call in authors also asked that Overview and Scrutiny rejected the Cabinet's proposal for "Post" decision scrutiny on the grounds that this sets a precedent for Cabinet to ignore the need for pre scrutiny of sensitive decisions by way of fait accompli post decision scrutiny after the event.

Decision taken:

1. That Cabinet notes the outcome of an appraisal of potential management options for leisure and sports provision (see annex 1 of the Cabinet report).
2. That, in accordance with the outcome of the management options appraisal, Cabinet agrees to the commencement of the implementation phase for the establishment of a new charitable trust for the provision of leisure and sports development services.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

The Committee heard evidence from:

- Portfolio Holder (Community Engagement)
- Leader of the Council
- Director Culture and Leisure

One member of the public addressed the Committee. Following the submission of all the evidence, the Committee concluded that it is not a statutory requirement for pre-decision scrutiny to take place and the forthcoming decision had been properly advertised on the Council's Foreword Plan and published within the correct timescales. Cabinet had not received a request by Overview and Scrutiny for pre-decision scrutiny on this issue.

- It was not appropriate for full public consultation to take place at this stage, however; clearly defined consultation will take place at the relevant stage of the process. Appropriate legal advice on the production of this report had been received.
- The report had been subject to the rigorous call-over process that each report goes through prior to its submission to Cabinet. Further legal advice will be obtained in setting up the Trust.
- An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) was produced for the management options appraised. Further EIAs will be produced as the details are worked up.
- The Liberal Democrat Group received a briefing on this issue by the Portfolio Holder (Community Engagement) prior to the Cabinet meeting of 3 March 2010. An invitation was issued on 22 February 2010 to the Leaders of the three Opposition Groups inviting them to attend a briefing but no responses to the invitation had been received.

The Committee further concluded that the Call-In Hearing had provided Councillors with a better understanding of the issue. It went on to resolve that it be recommended to Cabinet that a greater explanation be provided of the timeline of the implementation process regarding the leisure centres and possible Trust Status.

Key Outcomes

- Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 resolved that the Call-In be rejected on the grounds that insufficient evidence had been provided in support of the five reasons for call-in. The Committee further resolved that it be recommended to Cabinet that it give a greater explanation of the timeline of the implementation process regarding the leisure centres and possible Trust Status.
- The Call-In enabled a greater understanding to be provided about the process and the public was able to provide comments at the Hearing.



Overview & Scrutiny Committee **2**

Housing and Environment



Overview & Scrutiny Committee 2

Housing and Environment

welcome from

Councillor Christopher Malpas, Chair, Overview and Scrutiny 2

This is the third year that Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 (Housing and Environment) has been in operation. Over the course of 2009/2010 we have undertaken a number of detailed and in-depth Reviews that have covered issues of high importance on both the local and national agendas.

Details of the Review work can be found on page 38.

The issues that it has reviewed include:

- Sheltered Housing and Housing Options for Older People
- Council owned garages This Review is yet to be completed
- Choice Based Lettings

The Committee, in its role as a critical friend to Cabinet, carried out some effective pre-decision work, details of which are contained later in this Annual Report.

The Committee has continued to monitor progress on previous Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group work to ensure that recommendations are being carried out.

I would like to thank members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee (2) Housing and Environment for sitting on this Committee during its busy year.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Malpas'.

**Councillor
Christopher Malpas
Chair, Overview
and Scrutiny
Committee 2**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 has an extensive agenda that covers the remit of housing and environment.

Key outcomes and achievements

- Over the last year, Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 has successfully overseen one comprehensive Review, which investigated sheltered housing and housing options for older people. The Head of Adult and Social Care and the Chair of the Adult and Social Care Scrutiny Committee, Northamptonshire County Council, were co-opted onto this Review.
- Two Appreciative Inquiries - looking at Choice Based Lettings and Council owned Garages
- Pre decision Scrutiny - Proposed new Tenancy Agreement
- The Committee considered the Call-In to Cabinet's recommendations on the New Tenant Participation Structure
- Monitoring
- Performance Monitoring
- Budget Consultation

Reviews

Sheltered Housing and Housing Options for Older People

A Councillor Task and Finish Group was established. Councillor Gina Ogden, Northamptonshire County Council, and Fiona Seymour, Head of Adult Social Care, Northamptonshire County Council, co-opted members joined the Group. The purpose of the Task and Finish Group was:

- To establish whether the Sheltered Housing Service provides a value for money service and how it can be improved
- To establish residents' satisfaction levels and understanding of Sheltered Housing and Housing Options for Older People
- To determine a better understanding of the complex nature of Sheltered Housing



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2

This Review was included onto the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme as a result of a request from Management Board to undertake an Overview and Scrutiny Review.

There was also a response to a notice of motion put to full Council at its meeting on 13 July 2009:

Proposer Councillor David Palethorpe

Seconder Councillor Jamie Lane

“This Council notes the concerns of many local residents in Northampton about the Sheltered Housing system and the lack of personal contact they receive under the ‘floating support’ scheme, and believes it was a mistake by the Government to take Sheltered Housing out of the Housing Benefit budget, leaving Sheltered Housing within the underfunded Supporting People budget, and making it difficult for district councils to manage.

This Council therefore calls on the Chief Executive to urgently instigate a review of the system and listen to the concerns of local residents.”

The Task and Finish Group agreed that the following need to be investigated and linked to the realisation of the Council's corporate priorities:

- A synopsis of all information available
- Results of surveys undertaken
- Performance Indicator Statistics
- Evidence from the Portfolio Holder (Housing)
- Best practice Council Nottingham and Cambridge
- Visits to internal Sheltered Housing accommodation observing process and speaking to employees and tenants

- Visit to the Call Centre observing process and speaking to employees
- Evidence from tenants meetings, as part of the site sites, written evidence
- Evidence from:
 - SITRA
 - Northamptonshire County Council
 - Northants Health
 - Age Concern

Key findings included:

- The Task and Finish Group recognised that traditional sheltered housing is provided in a variety of forms and that Northampton, similar to other towns, has built and/or adapted accommodation as sheltered housing over the last fifty years.
- The financial costs of providing support to older people are significant. It is important that services demonstrate value-for-money, maximise their impact and deliver positive outcomes that contribute and complement the other support that older people receive (i.e. family, health service etc.)
- It was acknowledged that people are now living longer and the older population is growing. There are now more people aged over 60 than under 25 in the general population. The Task and Finish Group realised that this is a huge issue that needs to be addressed in order to understand the impact on Northampton.
- Further discussions are taking place with Supporting People regarding preventative services and it was acknowledged that it needs to adapt to the changing environment or risk losing Supporting People funding.



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- There is not one single solution of housing options for older people and that it must be about choice with a range of options available.
- A lot of elderly people live in general needs accommodation but cannot access support, therefore there is a need to review the situation and look more widely at a joined up approach with partners, which will assist greater numbers of people to live independently.
- After hearing all the evidence the Task and Finish Group agreed that the current set number of scheduled visits to sheltered housing tenants is not flexible enough and should be based on needs.
- The Task and Finish Group noted the importance of the benefits of the Telecare System but was concerned to hear that not all of the Telecare system was compatible with the Lifeline system currently operated by Northampton Borough Council. This system assists residents to live as independently as possible in their own homes. There are several 'add ons' to the system, which includes a medication dispenser, memo reminder and a plug to prevent flooding. The Task and Finish Group felt that with the Call Care Service, based at Exeter Place and the Telecare Scheme at Gladstone Centre there appeared to be some overlap in the assessment process and the Task and Finish Group supported discussions taking place regarding how this could be combined.
- The Task and Finish Group commended the excellent job that staff based at Exeter Place were doing but was concerned about the lack of office space and recommended that alternative office space be considered such as John Dryden House.
- The Task and Finish Group supported the investigations that are taking place into widening the provision of the Lifeline system, for example to individuals living on their own. It was acknowledged that this would create further income to the Council but may also require additional resources.
- The Task and Finish Group felt that it would be beneficial for dialogue to take place with Private Sector Housing Providers and to encourage the co-ordination and widespread use of the Lifeline System.
- There is a need to assist communities to help each other, and to invest in prevention initiatives that support independent living.
- The Task and Finish Group felt that some of the community rooms located within Sheltered Housing are poorly managed and under used and that discussions should take place how they could be better used.
- The Task and Finish Group noted the integrated system that is in operation within the Mental Health Service, which was brought in around eight years ago, works very well. Support is dependent upon the individual's needs. It was felt that this emphasised the need for a joined up approach of all Agencies for the service of sheltered housing and housing options for older people.
- The Schemes Review is scheduled to complete by May 2010 and it was noted that this Review is likely to see a recommendation for a decrease in sheltered housing properties across the borough.
- Currently ward Councillors are not made aware of the Sheltered Housing Coordinators are for each ward and the location of sheltered housing within each ward. The Task and Finish Group felt that it would be



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- beneficial for Councillors to be provided with such a list. It would be useful for Councillors to be furnished with this information in case of a problem.
- The Task and Finish Group felt that the sheltered housing coordinators' role should be clarified.
 - The Task and Finish Group noted the concerns raised by some residents regarding the loss of resident wardens and the replacement with floating support. Many residents realised that this was not the best way to deliver services, created dependency and was campaigned for by a vocal minority. The Task and Finish Group was therefore minded not to support the campaign for the return to traditional resident wardens.
 - It was recognised that there is a need to understand what is driving the requests for an on site warden. There is also a need to understand what people want so that issues such as the number of staff required can be understood; there may also be competition from the private sector. It was further realised that the Council was unable to continue with the old system and further consultation with residents and stakeholders would be required.
 - The Task and Finish Group was pleased to note that 86% of service users were relatively satisfied with the service following a user survey.
 - It was important however to understand the issues of the 14% who were not satisfied and work to make changes to improve services to this significant minority.
 - Northampton Borough Council has 47 Sheltered Housing Coordinators, which is equivalent to 37 and a half full time equivalent (FTE). It was noted that this is considered adequate to deliver the service contracted for. The Sheltered Housing Coordinators visit the 2,100 properties that are designated as sheltered housing in accordance with the three levels of support daily, three times a week or monthly. The Task and Finish Group noted that Milton Keynes Council has 26 full time and two part-time Sheltered Housing Officer that cover 29 Sheltered Housing Schemes, around 800 households. Each Sheltered Housing Officer is based at an office on site. The Sheltered Housing Officers carry out daily visits to tenants within their allocated sheltered housing scheme. Sheltered Housing Officers are funded via the Supporting People Programme.
 - The Task and Finish Group felt that consideration needs to be given as to how mobility scooters are best stored in the future and whether or not renting garages within the complex to people living outside is in the best interests of everyone concerned.
 - At the site visit to Milton Keynes, the Task and Finish Group heard that its Sheltered Housing tenants are permitted to use mobility scooters on site and in the corridors. Milton Keynes Council is putting together a Policy, with the Fire and Rescue Service stating the criteria for storage and charging of the vehicles. Tenants with such a vehicle will be required to have public liability insurance. It was suggested that when the Policy has been finalised that a copy should be forwarded to the Head of Housing Needs and Support.



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- Frequently smoking takes place in the communal lifts creating health and safety issues. The Task and Finish Group understands that the Sheltered Housing Co-ordinators are trying to resolve this situation but felt that extra steps will need to be taken to ensure that the safety and comfort of the residents is paramount.
- When visiting Sheltered Housing accommodation within the borough, the Task and Finish Group was concerned to note the ineffectiveness of warm air heating. The Group had met with a tenant sitting under a blanket to get warm as she was unable to use the warm air heating system as it affected her asthma.
- In putting together its Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) (screening) the Task and Finish Group was mindful of the need for a full EIA to be produced for Sheltered Housing for any future changes.
- After hearing all the evidence from various sources, the Task and Finish Group realised that a return to the old system of residential wardens would not improve services to older people and should not be returned to.
- To ensure that services represent excellent value for money, are competitive and deliver positive outcomes to promote independent living, a flexible structure of visits to sheltered housing tenants should be introduced according to individual needs. Such changes to be in line with the Supporting People grant conditions to safeguard this important funding stream.
- The Head of Housing Needs and Support be authorised to commence dialogue with private sector housing providers to encourage the co-ordination and widespread installation of the Lifeline system.
- The Task and Finish Group accepts that the floating support system generally works but highlights the need for flexibility of provision and to minimise the frequency of staff changes to ensure stability and continuity of service provision.

Recommendations:

- When considering the Task and Finish Group's recommendations that Cabinet recognises 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. 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.
- Discussions should take place regarding how Northamptonshire County Council and Northampton Borough Council can work more closely together to eliminate overlaps with some of the work streams at the Call Centre and Telecare Office.
- The use of digital technology should be maximised to support the delivery of services, such as Telehealth.
- Dialogue takes place between the Portfolio Holder (Housing), relevant key officers, ward Councillors, tenants and other concerned Agencies to investigate how the community rooms can be used to their full potential.



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- The Head of Housing Needs and Support be authorised to set up a meeting with Northamptonshire County Council, all relevant Agencies and organisations to promote a joined up approach to the delivery of services for older people, with a particular focus on the role of Voluntary Groups and the importance of community activities to counteract social isolation.
- A general review of the Garage Tenancy Agreement should take place to include the possible adaption of garages for the storage of mobility scooters.
- That the Head of Housing Needs and Support completes the review of sheltered housing properties and produces a plan that outlines which properties will no longer be designated as sheltered, identifying opportunities for new build which meets lifetime homes standards. The Task and Finish Group's observations about heating systems at some sheltered housing units to be taken into consideration during this review.
- A full consultation programme, in accordance with the Council's Consultation Toolkit, with existing and potential sheltered housing tenants, is developed regarding any proposed changes.
- Improved communication methods with existing and potential sheltered housing tenants is maintained. In particular to work with dissatisfied residents to understand their issues and respond to their concerns.
- The location of the Call Care service to be reviewed due to the poor quality of accommodation currently used and the service is relocated.
- A Policy for the storing of mobility scooters at sheltered housing accommodation is introduced. The evidence contained in this report should form part of that Policy.
- Ward Councillors to be issued with details of the location of sheltered housing and details of the Sheltered Housing Coordinators for each ward.
- The issue of security doors and access is reviewed in blocks of flats designated as sheltered housing.
- That the Head of Landlord Services is requested to address specific issues at Melbourne House as identified in the main body of this report. The first floor door entry systems at Melbourne, Abbey and Devonshire be redesigned or appropriately adjusted to alleviate the current problems encountered by tenants.
- A full Equality Impact Assessment is produced for future changes to Sheltered Housing.

Key Outcomes

- Not known. The report will be presented to Cabinet early in the Municipal Year 2010/2011



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Choice Based Lettings Appreciative Inquiry

This Review followed the format of an Appreciative Inquiry. A small number of Councillors worked with Housing Officers investigating the Choice Based Lettings System.

Three meetings of the Appreciative Inquiry were held and various issues challenged. There were no outstanding issues other than the promotion of the Choice Based Lettings Logo, which the Group was assured, would be rectified. The Appreciative Inquiry noted that the recent restructure of Housing Services had allowed for Officers to assist vulnerable people and was working well with positive outcomes.

The comments and observations of the Appreciative Inquiry were taken into consideration in production of the report to Cabinet.

The areas of change for the Choice Based Lettings Scheme that the Appreciative enquiry identified that would be implemented are as follows:

- Weekly Choice Based Lettings scheme adverts moving from fortnightly
- Producing weekly newsletters for customers and researching other methods of written communication other than the Chronicle and Echo newspaper to improve cover and customer satisfaction
- Community Language translation services on the Choice Based Lettings web site
- Linking the Choice Based Lettings scheme web site with Northampton Borough Council's employment creation and education/training development work for customers
- Under-occupation scheme re-launched to address greater needs
- Developing a sub-regional Choice Based Lettings scheme with Daventry District Council

- The introduction of a regular text messaging information service to customers
- The introduction of weekly out of hours surgeries for customers taking place between 6 to 8pm at the Guildhall on Thursday's
- Linking the Home Improvement and Disabled Facilities Grant work with the Choice Based Lettings scheme
- Publication of a six monthly newsletter to all customers on the Housing Register breaking down the myths and false perceptions, but also providing news on new initiatives and possible options to provide solutions to customers re-housing needs.
- Conducting six monthly customer satisfaction surveys in place of the current annual satisfaction surveys
- Designing an accessible housing register that sits within the Choice Based Lettings scheme to have a single data base for Northampton of all adapted and accessible affordable housing.

Key Outcomes

- This piece of Scrutiny activity demonstrated Overview and Scrutiny being involved in policy development in respect of the Choice Based Lettings System.



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Council Owned Garages

A Review into Council owned garages was called for following public representations to a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 and a non-Executive Councillor's request. An Appreciative Inquiry was set up to undertake research into garages in the borough and forward its findings to the Director of Housing.

The Appreciative Inquiry worked with Officers from the service area attending various site visits and reviewing background information. A definitive list has been produced for all Council owned garage sites and an assessment undertaken, which established the number of empty garages and occupied garages together with the waiting list demand for each of the sites. The Appreciative Inquiry visited three different garage locations. In addition, Council Officers visited every garage site and carried out a visual inspection. As a result of the inspections an assessment has been made rating garages from one of five rating: - very poor, poor, average, good or very good.

Key Outcomes

- This piece of Scrutiny activity demonstrated Overview and Scrutiny being involved in policy development in respect of Council owned garages

Pre-decision Scrutiny

The Committee carried out pre-decision scrutiny on a number of issues, strategies and plans over the last year.

Proposed New Tenancy Agreement

In scrutinising the draft Northampton Homeless Strategy, the Committee welcomed the proposed new Tenancy Agreement. Meetings were set up and Councillors had sight of the document and provided further comment prior to it being put out to consultation. Councillors commented on the wording in the document and their suggested changes were included.

Key Outcomes

- This piece of Scrutiny activity demonstrated Overview and Scrutiny fulfilling its role as a critical friend to Cabinet and being involved in policy development.
- Comments made by the Committee on the content of the draft proposed new Tenancy Agreement were included in the final document.
- The Committee supported and recommended the adoption of the new Tenancy Agreement.



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Revised Housing Strategy (2010-2015)

Following submission of the revising Housing Strategy (2010-2015) to the Committee, as part of the consultation process, an Appreciative Inquiry was set up. The Group worked with the Housing Strategy and Policy Manager to look at the revised Housing Strategy in detail and provide comment for inclusion in the consultation.

The Appreciative Inquiry was satisfied with the content of the document. It looked at the draft Action Plan in depth, discussing each point and deciding which issue was a priority. The draft Action Plan was therefore amended as a result of this piece of Scrutiny activity and will be attached to the revised Housing Strategy.

Key Outcomes

- This piece of Scrutiny activity demonstrated Overview and Scrutiny being involved in policy development in respect of the revised Housing Strategy (2010-2015)

Monitoring

The Committee monitored the following Overview and Scrutiny Review recommendations that had been accepted by Cabinet:

Street Scene (Abandoned Cars) Task and Finish Group report 2006

The purpose of this Task and Finish Group was to review poor performance indicators on the



collection of abandoned cars and to review the new legislation, Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment 2005 - to dealing with problems of side waste and litter left following refuse collection and whether appropriate resources are available.

Recommendations included:

- That the Council uses its powers, within legislation, to reduce the problems of vehicles being put up for sale on the highway and ensure they are dealt with before they become a major nuisance.
- That the Council ensures resources are directed to the hotspots for abandoned cars: Blackthorn, Ecton Brook, Eastfield Park and side streets around the Kettering and Wellingborough Roads.
- That action is taken, where it continues to be a problem to prevent vehicles being driven onto public parks and burnt out, in particular Hunsbury Park.
- That, in accordance with the Clean Neighbourhood and Environment Act 2005, retailers who allow litter within 100 yards of their premises are fined.



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- That Cabinet supports the gating of alleyways as a measure to reduce fly tipping.
- That the Council's legal department seeks an agreement with the Magistrates Court on the evidence required for the Council to achieve successful prosecution against fly-tipping and littering.
- That Cabinet considers adopting the Westminster model of prosecuting for fly tipping and littering and that a presentation is given to Northamptonshire Magistrates on the Council's intentions to adopt a similar process.
- That it be recommended to supermarkets that they all introduce a deposit system for the removal of supermarket trolleys from their premises.
- That leaflets in appropriate languages regarding recycling and refuse collection be distributed to households where the Council knows that there are people in the household who use that language. Leaflets in ethnic minority languages should be available through community organisations and made available to landlords.
- That landlords be encouraged to inform their tenants on the proper disposal of rubbish and that landlords be requested to provide proper places for tenants to store rubbish prior to collection by the Council, in particular, Landlords should take responsibility for informing new tenants of the waste collection date. The Council seeks to lead by example, as a landlord, by the way that it informs its tenants on the proper disposal of rubbish.

- That planning permission for new developments and conversions of properties for multi-occupation include a condition concerning the provision of facilities for tenants to store rubbish before collection.

Changes have been introduced to improve enforcement. Public Protection is now responsible for enforcement. An Enforcement Unit is being built up, which will carry out duties such as providing education and dealing with persistent offenders. Environmental Neighbourhood and Public Protection will pool resources.

Key Outcomes

- Changes have been introduced to improve enforcement.

Allotments (Water Charges) Task and Finish Group report 2006

The purpose of the Task and Finish Group was to investigate the reasons for the proposed water charges for allotment holders within the Borough.

Recommendations included:

- That there should be no introduction of water charges until all water pipes on all allotment sites have been replaced.
- That a Water Charging Policy be introduced containing the following conditions:
- Water usage to be charged at a rate per pole and per field as an incentive to each field to conserve water.



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- When permission to erect a shed on an allotment plot is granted, the placing of a water butt with guttering for water conservation should be a condition of approval.
- That when the water pipes are replaced, the installation of standpipes of allotment sites is explored.
- That consideration is given to taking out a short-term loan against future land sale to cover the cost of replacing water pipes on all allotment sites.

The following recommendations were outside the Group's original remit but were put forward for consideration to Cabinet as they are connected to the issue under Review. They arose during the work of the Review and are significant to the future management of the allotment sites and are offered as support to the work of the Council:

- That consideration is given to revisiting and updating the Allotment Strategy 2004. The Allotment Strategy should be adopted by April 2007. Once approved and implemented, it could be used as a benchmark for the future, such as an umbrella for a five-year business plan for each allotment site. Within the Allotment Strategy the following issues need to be addressed:
 - Security
 - Water conservation plan
 - Disabled access
 - Alternative methods to manage /run allotment sites
- That consideration be given to the introduction of 50% concessions for:

allotment rental charges and the following groups be considered:

- Individuals over 60 years of age
- Disabled users
- Unemployed users

Since the completion of this Scrutiny Review there have been recent improvements to allotments, which include:

- A refreshed Steering Group that is considering the priorities for allotments across the town and is currently out to consultation with allotment holders
- A Parks and Open Spaces Strategy is being developed. Allotments are included in this. Consultation workshops were held in July 2009
- An Allotments Officer is in post

Key Outcomes

- The Task and Finish Group work on water charges was cancelled as a refreshed Steering Group was set up to deal with all issues relating to allotments.



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Tree Policy Task and Finish Group 2006

The purpose of the Task and Finish Group was to review the Tree Policy within Northampton Borough Council and achieve a consistent Urban Landscape Management Policy within the Council.

Recommendations contained in the report included:

- Consider the draft Tree Policy proposed by the Group as the basis for a Northampton Borough Council Tree Policy.
- Seek public consultation on the draft Tree Policy.
- Give consideration to further resources to ensure the thorough maintenance of trees and the delivery of the Tree Policy.
- Require tree related complaints to be dealt with by an Administration Officer to free up the Tree Inspectors to undertake their inspections so that every tree within the borough is checked every twelve months for safety.
- Review the agreement with Northamptonshire County Council regarding tree cuttings being undertaken.
- Further work needs to be carried out on involving citizens' awareness being raised in tree maintenance.
- Consider including the maintenance of hedgerows in a future Policy.

Since this in-depth piece of Scrutiny activity, the issue of trees has been considered by the Service Area. A number of improvements have been implemented, which include resources for tree inspections, planned maintenance works as well

as emergency works. The level of complaints regarding trees has reduced. Work has overtaken the recommendations contained in the Tree Policy Task and Finish Group report.

Key Outcomes

- Since this in-depth piece of Scrutiny activity, the issue of trees has been considered by the Service Area and a number of improvements implemented.
- The level of complaints regarding trees had reduced.



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Billing Waste Water Working Group

In November 2007, representatives from a local group, CLEAN, addressed Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 conveying its concerns about Billing Sewerage Station in particular problems with odour emissions. CLEAN is an action group that declares itself to represent local businesses, householders and neighbours of the Anglian Water Waste Water Treatment Works. CLEAN has actively campaigned to ensure that the Council serves an Abatement Notice on Anglian Water.

In response to the concerns raised, the Committee set up a Working Party to review and evaluate the evidence to establish whether there was a statutory nuisance and to identify the range of alternative options to move forward and make recommendations.

Key findings and recommendations: -

After undertaking comprehensive research and receiving evidence from a variety of sources, it was concluded that:

- The Working Party has seen sufficient evidence to acknowledge that the work of Northampton Borough Council's Environmental Health Officers has been robust and professional, however to ensure continued improvements to the service, the

Environmental Health Department carries out periodic Reviews to ensure that their working practices continue to be in line with national standards and Government guidance

- At this time having given consideration to the weight of evidence and balance between that evidence and the current and planned works by Anglian Water, the Working Party considers that little or no benefit would be gained through the service of an Abatement Notice. It specifically notes that remedial works outlined within such an Abatement Notice would not necessarily resolve any future potential nuisances given the nature of the activity
- Notwithstanding the above statement, given the factors affecting the possibility of any potential future nuisance due to the nature of the activity and the many influencing factors, it is recommended that a robust proactive continuous monitoring regime is put in place by the Council's Environmental Health Department. This is to ensure that the planned improvements reduce odour omissions and that should they fail to do so there is evidence to support any necessary action
- The evidence collected by this Working Party is forwarded onto West Northamptonshire Development Corporation (WNDC) for its information in the consideration of any planning applications submitted by Anglian Water
- Anglian Water is and will continue to take appropriate action to manage the odour, working closely with the Council's Environmental Health Officers
- The Council's Environmental Health Officers are contacting each petitioner within the Northampton Borough Boundary, and forward the rest of the petition to Wellingborough Borough Council for action according to their processes



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Key Issues and Outcomes

- The plant itself is substantially complete. Ferric dosing is at just 10%.
- Active monitoring will be ongoing. The main focus will be on the primary settlement tanks, cake storage bays and storm water tanks.
- It was hoped that all measures would be in place by Summer 2010, but Anglian Water Limited has not as yet got the process up and running. Eventually 100% of sewerage should be processed and enhanced sludge would be the final product.
- The Primary Settlement Tanks (1) have catchment pits, which were open to the air but had now been sealed off and provided with odour control units.
- Weather conditions often determine when monitoring takes place. The intensity, hedonic tone and persistence of any smell are logged.
- Not all of the remedial measures have been implemented. The Working Group will revisit its report, and invite West Northamptonshire Development Corporation's (WNDC) planning officers to a meeting of the Group prior to any visit to the site. Planning Officers will also be contacted to ascertain whether planning conditions have been adhered to throughout the process.

Best Value Performance Monitoring

Like its partner Overview and Scrutiny Committees, the Chair and Vice Chair scrutinise the monthly Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPs) and request a report or further information on those that they feel need further investigation.

Over the year, Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 has investigated:

BV212 - Average time taken to re let local authority homes

The Committee scrutinised the challenging targets that had been set for the time taken to re-let Local Authority homes.

Key Outcomes

- NBC is ranked 22 out of 51 (upper median)
- The year-end improvement generated extra rent income of around £45,000.
- An Action Plan is being worked up to improve on the re-letting times



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BV213 - Number of households who considered themselves homeless who approached the local authority housing advice service and for whom advice casework intervention solved their situation

The Committee investigated BV213 in detail.

Key Outcomes

- The position at the end of January 2009 was 2, compared to 8 as of the end of 2008/09.
- NBC is ranked 5 out of 10 (upper median)

BV183a Average time in temporary accommodation bed and breakfast

The Committee scrutinised BV183a.

Key Outcomes

- The position at the end of January 2009 was 1.8, compared to 1.68 as of the end of 2008/09.
- NBC is ranked 10 out of 21 (upper median)
- There were no families in bed and breakfast accommodation in the final quarter of 2008 financial year.
- The number of households in temporary accommodation at year-end was 33, the lowest for five years.

BV66a - Rent collected by the local authority as a proportion of rents owed on HRA dwellings

The Committee investigated BV66a in detail.

Key Outcomes

- The position at the end of January 2009 was 91.65%, compared to 96.26% as of the end of 2008/09.
- The collection rate for the year is 100.34% against the total annual debt, allowing for arrears carried forward this reduces to 96.26%. The year-end arrears figures are £1,358,086, the lowest outturn arrears figures for many years.

BV66b - Number of local authority tenants with more than seven weeks of (gross) rent arrears as a percentage of the total number of council tenants

The Committee inspected the data for the number of Local Authority tenants with more than seven weeks of (gross) rent arrears as a percentage of the total number of council tenants

Key Outcomes

- The position at the end of January 2009 was 8.22% compared to 7.36% as of the end of 2008/09.
- The number of accounts owing more than seven weeks gross rent at year-end was 876, a reduction of 375 from April 2008.
- Community Law (previously known as Welfare Rights) ensures that an officer is in court to help tenants to try to ensure that they do not lose their homes.



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BV66c - Percentage of Local Authority tenants who received notices seeking possession

The Committee scrutinised BV66c.

Key Outcomes

- The position at the end of January 2009 was 29.94% compared to 34.04% as of the end of 2008/09.
- Action to target arrears cases with notices at earlier stages is producing results in improved cash collection figures and reduced arrears. This figure has an impact on overall collection rates, as the serving of a notice of seeking possession is one of a range of steps taken to recover arrears.
- The Rent Income Plan 2008/2010 introduces a range of preventative measures that will be used at early stages before problems with rent arrears escalate.

BV166a - Score against a checklist of enforcement best practice for environmental health

The Committee investigated BV166a in detail.

Key Outcomes

- BV166a is no longer a national indicator but up to 2008 the Council was 100%. This indicator has been replaced by the Better Regulation Executive with NI182 which is the satisfaction of businesses with Council regulators and the pending statutory guidance /codes on enforcement.

BV216b - Number of sites for which detailed information is available to decide whether remediation of the land is necessary as a percentage of all sites of potential concern

The Committee investigated the number of sites for which detailed information is available to decide whether remediation of the land is necessary as a percentage of all sites of potential concern.

Key Outcomes

- BV216b is being phased out and has been subject to a significant amount of criticism within the contaminated land community during their brief lifetime. There are wide differences in the way that the baseline figures are measured between Local Authorities and as a result there are significant differences.
- The indicator measures numbers of sites rather than the actual area of land where there is sufficient information. This is a potential disadvantage to Northampton where in recent years a number of large sites have been remediated.



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NI 156 Number of households living in temporary accommodation

The Committee scrutinised NI156. NI156 is an important performance indicator as it shows the direction of travel and any weaknesses. It is used by the Audit Commission when inspecting Local Authorities to measure the success of the homeless service in each Local Authority area.

Key Outcomes

- By 31 December 2010, the national target is to reduce to the use of temporary accommodation by 50%.
- Northampton Borough Council has not used bed and breakfast accommodation since January 2009.

HI 18 Number of households who considered themselves homeless who approach the Local Authority housing advice service and for whom advice casework intervention solved their situation.

The Committee investigated HI 18 in detail.

Key Outcomes

- The target for each quarter is 180 households prevented from becoming homeless. As at quarter three, the target for the first nine months was missed by ten homeless prevention cases.
- Should homeless prevention work continue for the first three months of 2010, totaling 190 cases, NBC would remain in the top quartile

Call-In - New Tenant Participation Structure

The decision of Cabinet in relation to the New Tenant Participation Structure was called in for scrutiny on the grounds of:

- 1) *Inadequate Consultation with Tenants*
- 2) *Failure of Council to ensure further pre scrutiny of the process as noted by Cabinet at its meeting of March 18th 2009:*
 1. The Council is to adopt, at this stage, the 'selection' methodology for choosing Tenant Board members as indicated as the preferred option by 50% of the tenants responding to the consultation. It will promote further resident engagement in the process of establishing its new resident involvement structure.
 2. The Council is to agree an initial Area Housing Partnership Board composition of two Members, three local senior staff and five tenants with an option for the Boards to further co-opt independent Board members.
 3. During October to December 2009, the Council is to implement a programme to support the development of the Area Housing Partnership Boards by the promotion and provision of joint training and Board development sessions aimed at the relevant Members, Officers and tenants for each of the four Housing Areas.
 4. The Council is to note the initial suggestions made by tenants during the consultation about what should constitute the elements of a Board member person specification.



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5. The process of appointing tenants to the Area Partnership Boards will begin in accordance with the timetables outlined in the report
6. A further progress report is to be forwarded to Cabinet in March 2010.
7. Elected Member engagement as part of this process will commence.

The Committee heard evidence from:

- Portfolio Holder (Housing)
- Leader of the Council
- Director of Housing
- Housing Advisor

Four members of the public addressed the Call-In Hearing, conveying their concerns.

- Following the submission of all the evidence, the Committee concluded that the consultation exercise had altered towards the end of the process and the script used by the telephone canvassers had been unclear. The script was too long and difficult to understand.
- There had been inadequate consultation.
- The consultation leaflet was not fit for purpose; it had not detailed a date for the end of the consultation. The consultation leaflet was not targeted correctly to all tenants, communication should have been written so that it was accessible to all, with a reading age of thirteen.
- In the Committee's opinion the Council had appeared to select its own Telephone Panel.
- It appeared that the Council's Consultation Toolkit had not been taken into consideration fully during this consultation exercise.
- The Council is now a Level 3 Equality Authority and on the lack of an Equality Impact

Assessment alone the consultation exercise was inadequate.

- The Committee questioned the competencies of PEP. Therefore, Cabinet should undertake this process correctly, adopting a multifaceted
- Communications approach to the consultation, which should be carried out in-house and be fully evidenced.
- Records should be kept of those tenants who do not want to engage.

The Committee further concluded that due to timing issues, no pre-decision Scrutiny had been undertaken on this issue. Therefore, on account of the time constraints involved, the Committee will set up an Appreciative Inquiry in order to pre-decision scrutinise any further consultation and then consider the results of that further consultation exercise.

Following deliberation session, it was resolved that the Call-In be accepted as there had been inadequate consultation and Cabinet had failed to ensure further pre-decision Scrutiny of the process. Specifically

- The leaflet used within the consultation was not fit for purpose
- No end date was specified on the leaflet
- No Equalities Impact Assessment was carried out
- Those surveyed by telephone were 'self-selected'
- The Council's Customer Engagement Toolkit was not adhered to appropriately.
- Further consideration should be made to the script for the telephone canvassers
- The options for tenants were amended part way through the consultation process.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2

- (2) That on the grounds that Cabinet failed to ensure further pre-decision Scrutiny of the process as noted by Cabinet at its meeting of March 18th 2009, the Committee accepted reason 2 for Call-In.
- (3) That Cabinet is recommended to carry out the consultation exercise again using a multi faceted communications approach, issued in appropriate language. The consultation exercise should be evidence based to show that it has been correctly carried out.

Key Outcomes

- Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 accepted this Call-In on the grounds that there had been inadequate consultation and Cabinet had failed to ensure further pre-decision Scrutiny of the process.
- The Call-In enabled a greater understanding to be provided about the proposals and for the public and other stakeholders to express their opinions to the Call-In Hearing.
- Further key outcomes not known at this stage. Cabinet is scheduled to provide its response early in the Municipal Year 2010/2011.

Budget Consultation

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 was consulted on the proposed general fund budget for 2010/2013 in relation to housing and environmental issues.



Overview & Scrutiny Committee **3**

Finance, Performance and Improvement



Overview & Scrutiny Committee **3**

Finance, Performance and Improvement

welcome from

Councillor Jamie Lane, Chair, Overview and Scrutiny 3

I am pleased to present the third annual report by Northampton Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 for Improvement, Performance and Finance. This report looks at our activities over the past 12 months.

The Committee has been busy analysing performance measures and looking at ways of improving them, in particular we scrutinised the Council's Sickness and Absence Monitoring Performance Indicators.

The Committee has continued to be very active in the budget process. The Reporting and Monitoring Working Group will continue to monitor the changes that have been implemented due to the budget.

We have set up Task and Finish Groups to look at:

- Monitoring and budget programme
- Cost of Consultants to the Authority

I would like to thank members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee (3) Improvement, Performance and Finance for sitting on this Committee during its busy year.



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jamie Lane'.

**Councillor
Jamie Lane
Chair, Overview
and Scrutiny
Committee 3**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3

The agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 seeks to examine and influence policies under its remit of improvement, performance and finance.

- Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 successfully oversaw and delivered one comprehensive Review during 2009/2010. The Task and Finish Group interviewed key witnesses, carried out desktop research, looked at models of good practice and gathered statistical information and data to aid the Review process.
- The Reporting and Monitoring Working Group continues to demonstrate effective scrutiny the budget
- The Committee considered two Call-In to Cabinet's recommendations on evaluating ways of delivering services and improving value for money for the Council tax payers of Northampton and Archway Cottages, Abington Park
- Monitoring
- Performance Monitoring
- Budget Consultation
- To consider the alternatives to using consultants
- To consider the alternatives to using agency labour
- To assess the risks involved in implementing these alternatives
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the work undertaken by consultants within the authority and determine the impact on the existing staff base
- To consider the costs involved by the Council in using consultants and to compare these costs to other similar local authorities, department by department, for the years 2005/06 and 2007/08
- To consider the costs involved by the Council in using agency labour and to compare these costs to other similar local authorities, department by department, for the years 2005/06 and 2007/08
- To examine the procurement arrangements associated with consultants department by department, for the years 2005/06 and 2007/08
- To examine the procurement arrangements associated with agency labour department by department, for the years 2005/06 and 2007/08
- To examine the procedure for the procurement arrangements associated with consultants and how this is budgeted for and financed
- To examine whether the use of consultants is a skilling or de-skilling process

Reviews

Cost of Consultants

The objective of this Review was:

- To investigate the reasons for the use of consultants at Northampton Borough Council
- To investigate the reasons for the use of agency labour at Northampton Borough Council



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3



Key findings included:

- In considering *Transforming the procurement of temporary, agency and interim staff: your toolkit for success*, which was commissioned by the London Centre of Excellence (LCE), the Task and Finish Group felt that there are alternatives to the employment of Agency Staff such as the engagement of different types of trainee posts such as undergraduate student placements, graduate placements, future jobs fund, and apprenticeships from The University of Northampton and Northampton College with generic skills. A central base of between one and four postgraduate students could be created. The Task and Finish Group further felt that it would be beneficial for there to be a 'floating workforce' that could be pooled by all departments.
- The Task and Finish Group highlights the fact that during the period of 2005/2006 central Government had provided financial assistance to the Authority for the engagement of consultants. Bearing this in mind the figures for this period may appear high.
- There is a need to know how the Council has received value from money from a consultant both during their skills of engagement with the Council and whether these skills have been maintained. The engagement of consultants should be according to service need or specialist positions and be time limited. It is crucial that there is a clear understanding about the difference between locum and consultant. The Task and Finish Group welcomed the definitions of such staff that were provided by the Head of Human Resources. The Task and Finish Group further realised that, as the engagement of consultants should be time limited there was a need for an independent check around the time scale of to be implemented.
- It was noted that over the periods that the Task and Finish Group investigated the Council has a Policy to reduce the spend on Agency Staff, in particular as part of the budget savings in 2009/10 it had been agreed that the Authority would reduce its spend on agency staff by £200, 000. This would be undertaken by applying this approach to agency staff. The Task and Finish Group was surprised to see this saving was for white collar Agency Staff only, and that blue collar Agency Staff were used more to generate savings. It appeared that the higher the cost of a Post the more of a saving by reducing consultants.
- During the period of time of the Task and Finish Group brokers were changed, the Task and Finish Group recognised the need for changed but felt that there was a need for the Policy to be further developed and expanded
- The Task and Finish Group noted that part of the way that business is carried out in Neighbourhood Environment involves using Agency staff and it was realised that this is the



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3

most value for money way in delivering the service also providing a lot of flexibility. Grounds and street maintenance do not need the cover as much as the refuse lorries. Agency staff is now only brought in to cover sickness absence on the refuse lorries not for street and grounds maintenance. In future, in-house staff may be asked to provide cover for sickness absence on the refuse lorries.

- The Task and Finish Group highlighted the recruitment process within Neighbourhood Environment in particular when a permanent FTE left the service they would not be replaced with a full time employee but with Agency Staff. It was noted that the turnover of staff has not been huge, mainly due to the recession. It was also noted that this method of recruitment is set to continue as it makes NBC more competitive in terms of costs. Bearing this in mind, the Task and Finish Group felt that there is a need for the Council to have a Policy stating, for example that no more than 30% Agency Staff be employed. Should the service go out to competitive dialogue with a Company that has say for example, 80% Agency staff and just 20% full time employees this would not meet the Council's Policy. It was emphasised that there does need to be a balance between quality and cost. The Task and Finish Group suggested that a Policy could be produced which stated that the Council managed the workforce and maintained the standard. It was emphasised that there would be clear legal implications regarding a stated Policy on the employment of Agency Staff. As a major employer the Council needs to be seen to helping the economy. It is accepted that there is a need for Agency Staff but an appropriate level must be met in normal circumstances.

Recommendations included:

- A procedure based on the document "*Transforming the procurement of temporary, agency and interim staff: your toolkit for success*" is produced and used by each Service Area when engaging temporary, Agency and Interim staff.
- Cabinet considers the engagement of students from University of Northampton and Northampton College as well as apprenticeships and future job fund opportunities with generic skills, for the filling of temporary vacancies that are currently filled by Agency Staff. A central base of between one and four postgraduate students could be created.
- Consideration is given to the introduction of a floating workforce that could be pooled by all departments.
- Build 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 be expanded and reviewed including: -
- Setting a maximum percentage target for each directorate of Agency staff.
- Confirm the definitions within the policy based on the definitions as set out in this report

Key Outcomes

- Not known. The report will be presented to Cabinet early in the Municipal Year 2010/2011



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3

Monitoring and Reporting Budget Programme

Due to the inclement weather that we saw this year, the Reporting and Monitoring Working Group was unable to meet to put forward recommendations to which issues of the draft General Fund Budget 2010/13. It felt each individual Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be consulted upon. Instead consultation took place with the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees.

The working Group will monitor the effects and implications of the General Fund Revenue Budget 2010/2013.

It will then monitor the General Fund Revenue Budget proposals for 2011/2014 following the same format as for previous years and will again monitor the effects and implications of any changes.

Key Outcomes

- The Monitoring and Reporting Budget Programme Working Group continues to demonstrate effective scrutiny involvement in the budget process.

Best Value Performance Monitoring

The Chair and Vice Chair scrutinise the monthly Best Value Performance Indicators and request a

report or further information on those that they feel needs to be investigated further. This year Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 investigated: -

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

The Committee scrutinised BV8. This Authority has always had difficulty with this BV8 but the December figures have improved. The biggest issue is getting services to deal with invoices in a prompt manner. Reminder emails are issued. Purchase orders must be raised properly. Often an invoice will come in, that has no Purchase Order, has not been Goods Received or has a different amount, which can cause delays.

Key Outcomes

- It is not a statutory requirement to report on this Performance Indicator (PI) anymore but it will be continued to be monitored as a corporate PI.
- A monthly report is sent to all Heads of Services with outstanding invoices. (League tables are produced which name and shame). There is a robust chasing process.

The Authority aims to attempt to pay a supplier with NN postcode within seven days but to allow this to happen the invoice must have cleared on the system.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3

Budget Proposals

Like its associate Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 took part in the Revenue Budget Consultation Process, making comment on issues relevant to its remit.

Call-In

Call In -Evaluating Ways of Delivering Services and Improving Value for Money for the Council Tax Payers of Northampton

The decision in relation to evaluating ways of delivering services and improving value for money for the Council Tax Payers of Northampton was called in for scrutiny for the following reason: -

1) *In the Forward Plan 1st July 2009 to 31st October 2009, the item 'Evaluating Ways of Delivering Services' was not identified as a Key Decision. This means that this item was not subject to wider consultation and Overview and Scrutiny committees were not engaged as to the need for pre-scrutiny prior to any Cabinet determination.*

2) *The Report of 8th July 2009 is described as a 'Key Decision' and therefore contradicts the same item designation within the Forward Plan.*

3) *As the decision was incorrectly identified as 'Non Key' in the Forward Plan, by Cabinet determining on the Report of 8th July and not invoking the grounds of 'general exception' or 'special urgency', it breached the Constitutional Rules and Procedures of the Council.*

4) *By circumventing the usual and agreed Constitutional protocols of the Council and*

releasing the 8th July 2009 Report as a general press release before back-benchers had even had sight of it, the administration severely and predictably compromised the position of elected members when asked for views by the press and members of the public.

- 1.** It has been decided to undertake a full market testing exercise to determine the most cost effective and efficient way to deliver waste management, street care and grounds maintenance services and so improve VFM of these services for Council Tax payers.
- 2.** Cabinet's commitment has been given to implementing the findings of this particular market testing exercise if a well defined and robust business case is established that supports this course of action, subject to paragraph 3 and 4 below.
- 3.** It has been noted that further reports will be brought forward throughout the course of this market testing exercise if key decisions need to be made.
- 4.** It has been noted that, further to paragraph 3 above, before any contract or tender is awarded as a result of the market testing of waste management, street care and grounds maintenance services, a report will be brought to Cabinet to seek its agreement.
- 5.** That, subject to specific agreement with the relevant portfolio holder, approval has also been given to the principle and practice of market testing Council services. Where it is considered that the external market might provide greater opportunities to achieve better value for money, efficiencies and effectiveness in service delivery, as part of the Strategic Business Review programme or as distinct projects.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3

6. It has been noted that the Trade Unions have been informed of this proposal and that management are seeking positive and active engagement of the Trades Unions in pursuing this programme, to ensure that the proper interests of all employees, whether Union members or not, are duly considered.
7. Working together with other Councils on market-testing has been endorsed by Cabinet where this enables potential mutual benefits and sharing of the costs of market-testing, as long as such joint working does not fetter future discretion by this Council.

The Committee heard evidence from:

- The Leader of the Council
- The Chief Executive

Following the submission of all the evidence, the Committee concluded that as the Cabinet report was incorrectly designated key decision on the Cabinet agenda of 8 July 2009 that it had no status and that Cabinet should therefore undertake this process correctly.

The Committee further concluded that Cabinet be asked to instruct the appropriate officer to circulate the definition of a key decision to all members of the Council.

Upon a vote, the Committee:

Resolved:

- (1) That after all the evidence had been heard that the Call-In be accepted on the grounds that for transparency the process should be correctly followed. The report had been incorrectly designated key decision on the Cabinet agenda of 8th July 2009. The report is a legal document that was not designated

properly and therefore does not have proper status.

- (2) That Cabinet instructs the appropriate officer to circulate the definition of a key decision to all Members of the Council.

Key Outcomes

- Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 accepted this call-in on the grounds that for transparency the process should be correctly followed. The report had been incorrectly designated key decision on the Cabinet agenda of 8th July 2009. The report is a legal document that was not designated properly and therefore does not have proper status.
- The Call-in enabled a greater understanding of the process.
- The Committee continued to receive regular updates on the issue - evaluating Ways of Delivering Neighbourhood Services.
- A Working Group of the Committee, as a critical friend to Cabinet, will undertake in-depth pre-decision scrutiny of the issue
- Cabinet response to the outcome of the Call-In Hearing was that in considering the Scrutiny Committee's comments it agreed that, as the decision had proper status, therefore Cabinet was happy to re-confirm the decision. With reference to Committee's other recommendation it was pointed out that the definition of a key decision was accessible for Members of the Council in the Constitution, as well as being outlined on the Forward Plan and the front page of the Cabinet agenda. The Monitoring Officer was asked to reaffirm this with Members.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3



Call In Future of Archway Cottages, Abington Park

The decision of Cabinet in relation to the Future of Archway Cottages, Abington Park, was called in for scrutiny on the grounds that *“Alternative options were not developed by the Council resulting in Cabinet Members being able to make an appropriate informed decision”*

1. Consideration has been given to the objections made to the proposed disposal of Archway Cottages including associated garden land, shown for the purposes of identification edged with a dark line upon the plan attached to the Cabinet report ('the Property').
2. Cabinet's 'in principle' decision made on 7 April 2008 to dispose of the Property by the grant of a 125 years lease, on terms that lead to the restoration of the properties in accordance with listed building requirements is confirmed.
3. Cabinet has acknowledged the risk that the grant of such a long lease could lead ultimately to individual occupiers of the cottages exercising statutory rights to acquire the freehold of their homes.

The Committee heard evidence from:

- Portfolio Holder (Finance)
- The Leader of the Council
- Director of Finance and Support
- Asset Manager

After all the evidence had been presented, the Committee concluded that Cabinet had been furnished with adequate evidence and had considered alternative options for Archway Cottages.

Key Outcomes

- The Committee resolved that the Call-In be rejected on the grounds that it was unfounded as Cabinet had considered adequate evidence and alternative options had been considered.





Contact details for more information

Tracy Tiff, Overview and Scrutiny Officer, is always very happy to speak to local people about the activities of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. 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 **Meeting Services**.

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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 **Tracy Tiff on
01604 837408**

Jesli angielski nie jest Twoim jezykiem ojczystym a potrzebujesz pomocy w przetlumaczeniu tego dokumentu, prosze skontaktuj sie z Tracy Tiff pod numerem 01604 837408

Если английский не Ваш родной язык и Вам нужна помощь с переводом этого документа, то свяжитесь с Трайсу Тиф.Тел. 01604 837408

Haddii afka Ingriisigu aanu ahayn luuqad-daada kowaad oo aad u baahan-tahay in lagaa caawiyo turjumidda warqaddan fadlan kala xidhidh Tracy Tiff tilifoonka 01604 837408

如果英語不是你的主要說用語言而需要幫助將這份文件翻譯，請致電 01604 837408 向 Tracy Tiff 提出要求。


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Suggest an item for Overview and Scrutiny to investigate?

Do you have any suggestions for issues for inclusion onto the Overview and Scrutiny future Work Programme? If so please complete the form opposite and return to: -

 **Overview and Scrutiny**
Northampton Borough Council
The Guildhall
St Giles Square
Northampton
NN1 1DE

 **Email:** ttiff@northampton.gov.uk

Just as Overview and Scrutiny has considerable influence when used in the right way, there are times when other procedures are more appropriate.

Overview and Scrutiny cannot help in the following areas:

- Individual complaints about specific issues - these should be taken up through Northampton Borough Council's Customer Care Procedure.
- Proper accounting for money of the Council - this is the responsibility of the Audit Committee - for information, contact **01604 837356**
- The conduct or behaviour of a councillor or officer - this is the responsibility of the Standards Committee - for information, contact **01604 837101**.

It cannot be guaranteed that items raised in this way will actually be considered by Overview and Scrutiny.

Suggested Issues for Overview and Scrutiny

Name:

Email:

Telephone:

Issues suggested for inclusion on the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

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