

# Northampton Borough Council

## Community Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committee

9 Oct 2003

### **Present:**

Councillor Miah (Deputy Chair, in the Chair); Councillors Glynane, M Hoare, Lane, Malpas, Mason, Pritchard, Yates and D McKintonsh (co-optee)

Head of Overview and Scrutiny

Councillor Hill

Councillor Wood

Councillor B Hoare

P Newham, Borough Solicitor (Item 5)

J Warlow, Director of Strategic Resources (Item 5)

R Bowmer, Head of Financial Strategy (Item 5)

S Eley, Environmental Health Manager (Item 6)

C Rous, Sustainable Development Officer (Item 6)

J Delahunty, Head of Health & Community Involvement (Item 7)

S Silver, Community Leadership Manager (Item 7)

L Brede, Neighbourhood Information & Inclusion (Item 7)

S Riley, Federation of Residents' Associations

Mr Connell, Chair, Far Cotton Residents' Association

Meetings Services Officer

### **1. Apologies**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Acock.

### **2. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2003 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

### **3. Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)**

There were none.

### **4. Deputations/Public Addresses**

Councillor Woods was granted leave to address the Committee and circulated a letter with reference to the closure of the Harborough Road allotments and their use as an extension to the cemetery. Due to the poor level of consultation, this had been called-in by the Health and Environment Scrutiny Committee, who had recommended to the Executive that this Committee develop a set of standards on consultation for use by the Borough Council. The Executive considered the call-in on 14 August, and resolved that a consultation protocol be devised through the Best Value and Overview and Scrutiny processes.

Councillor Woods formally requested that this Committee considered undertaking such a protocol.

**Conclusion:** That this request be considered at Item 7, which incorporates consultation mechanisms.

### **5. Delapre Abbey – Issues Paper**

It was noted that the report circulated with the agenda had been referred by the Executive to both this Committee and the Financial Strategy and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Hill, who was taking a lead role in co-ordinating the progress towards the future of Delapre Abbey, updated the Committee on the current situation. As yet, a firm decision had not been reached, but the Executive was considering the option of a charitable trust. The main consideration regarding the future of the Abbey was that it had to be financially viable.

The Borough Solicitor commented that further meetings with the appropriate Officers and Members would be held in the future and that, at this early stage, it was not necessary to become embroiled in discussions on private companies and the implications for the Borough Council.

In response to a question from Councillor Yates regarding security and weatherproofing of the Abbey, Councillor Hill advised that NBC expected to receive money from English Partnerships imminently. The Director of Strategic Resources further advised that a company called Mears had been commissioned and had undertaken a full survey on the Abbey. As a result of this, it was now known what was required in terms of weatherproofing, and therefore further financial requests could be made to both English Partnerships and the County Council. It was hoped that the necessary weatherproofing could therefore be carried out before the inclement weather began.

Regarding security, the Committee was advised that this had been significantly increased at double the cost of the previous budget for this, and was now far more effective than it had previously been.

**Conclusions:** (1) Members noted the Issues Paper and requested further detailed information prior to initialising the proposal.

(2) That Members of this Committee work closely with the Financial Strategy and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee in monitoring the progress and future of Delapre Abbey.

## **6. Local Agenda 21**

Members had previously requested information regarding Local Agenda 21, as it was part of the Community Leadership Portfolio remit.

An information document that explained the ethos of LA21 was circulated. This outlined the aims, objectives and government policies for ensuring a better quality of life, now and in the future, for development. The basis of this was sustainable development, which did not just include green issues but social issues as well. Government policy included 10 principles to be taken into account by all local authorities. As such, NBC had prepared and published its own strategy in 2002, which explained how the strategy would be implemented through the action plan, which was also contained in the document.

Quality of Life Indicators (QLIs) would measure the effectiveness of the strategy by measuring change over time, and it was hoped to make a report on this in September 2004.

Activity to meet some of the Indicators was already underway around the Borough, such as the Upton Project; air quality monitoring and the multi-modal transport study. Air quality monitoring stations were currently set up at Grange Park, UCN and on two junctions on the M1. The committee also heard that an environmental impact assessment would be made on any future major development, and sustainability would be built into development plans.

Members heard that the Corporate Sustainable Development Steering Group would be attending the next full Council meeting to give a briefing seminar and presentation to raise awareness of Local Agenda 21. It was hoped to encourage new members onto the Group, which invites the involvement of all councillors with an interest in the issues.

The importance of Local Agenda 21 was emphasised in that almost every activity undertaken by the council had a potential impact on sustainable development. In response to a question from the Chair regarding assessment of the Northampton strategy, it was noted that indicators were being selected both internally and externally and would hopefully be reported on this time next year.

Members agreed the importance of LA21 issues and offered support to officers to raise the profile of the strategy. It was suggested that the document presented be placed on the Council's Website. Members also noted that the remit of this Committee encompassed everything in LA21.

**Conclusion:** That this Committee monitor the progress of the Northampton strategy and receive regular reports and updates.

## **7. Best Value Review Scoping Document – Area Partnerships & Forums**

The Committee was advised that the Community Involvement Best Value Review was at stage 2. The circulated document was a draft of the stage 2 scope.

The Committee was advised that the Best Value Review Scoping Document would be tabled at the Executive meeting of 20 October, where it was hoped formal approval would be given. It had come before this Committee in order to gain its views and comments before the Executive meeting.

Two of the key issues of the Scope were locality working and to develop a co-ordinated approach to consultation in the community, with the emphasis being very much on partnership work.

With regard to Forums, the Committee heard that the conclusions of the questionnaire were yet to be drawn into the bigger picture. It was hoped that meetings between the Chairs and co-Chairs of the Forums would take place in order to monitor and assess their effectiveness.

Members were also updated on the current situation regarding the Youth Forum. Members of this were currently aged between 13 and 16 years of age, and while this had been relatively successful, it was felt that it would be more beneficial to open this up to a wider age range. Consequently, membership would range between 13 and 19 years of age. It was hoped that this would provide a positive opportunity to remind young people of social responsibilities and citizenship. It had also been recognised that young people's issues were not about the Borough Council alone, and so other agencies such as Connexions and Life Long Learning were key partners.

With reference to Area Partnerships and the merge with the County Council, Councillor Hill advised that he and Councillor Tavener had met with County Councillor Ashton on 3 occasions, but there were outstanding issues had still to be resolved. The main difficulty was in the fact that the County Council Committees were decision-making bodies and worked on a 'top-down' basis, as formal committees, whereas the Borough Council Partnerships were all-inclusive and welcomed the public as equal partners. Discussions were ongoing and it was hoped to find a solution soon.

A paper was circulated from the Federation of Residents' Associations, which outlined their expectations of Area Partnerships. The Chair of the Federation commented that the Area Partnerships needed to be much more inclusive, by encouraging representation from many more different groups and organisations and by using more user-friendly language. She also registered her disappointment that a representative of NALC had not been co-opted onto this Committee as a co-optee, despite the suggestion being made some time ago. The

Committee was advised that a written request to NALC to consider the co-option had not received a response.

In response to a suggestion that a Chair of a Residents' Association chair a meeting of the Area Partnership, Councillor Hill commented that this was not particularly straightforward because of the decision-making powers of the County Council.

Councillor Hill advised that it was important to push things forward, particularly in light of the fact that the County Council would be implementing their new arrangements in January 2004.

**Conclusion:** That the Committee accept the Scoping Document, and monitor its implementation and progress and receive regular updates.

## **8. Town Twinning – Verbal Update**

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny updated the Committee on the work of the Twinning Association working party, which included the Chair of the Twinning Association, Brian Lawrence and two other members of the Association.

The history of the Association and its role as a voluntary organisation, as well as the relationship with the Twin Town's Associations were outlined. Members heard about the low-key role NBC played in regard to hospitality for visiting dignitaries, financial support and reciprocal arrangements. Examples of the twin town visits and level of hospitality shown were provided.

The current Twinning Association Chair was due to retire next year and the membership needed revitalisation. Councillor Hill offered his support and willingness to take part in the Twinning Association.

A small amount of funding was available from NBC through the Civic fund, but the Twinning Association experienced great difficulty in accessing that money. Next year would see the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the twinning with Poitiers and the Committee agreed that a package of events by the Twinning Association, with NBC, would be encouraged. It was suggested that a contact officer be established within the Borough Council and that links forged with tourism, particularly with regard to accommodation and reciprocal visits

**Conclusions:**

- (1) That the Committee recommend a contact officer within the Borough Council be established.
- (2) That this Committee receives regular reports and updates from the twinning sub-group and/or the Twinning Association.
- (3) That the matter of funding be resolved.
- (4) That an approach be made to obtain and display pictures of twin towns and dignitaries in the Jeffery Room.