NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET AGENDA

Tuesday, 25 September 2007

Jeffery Room, the Guildhall

5:00 pm

Members of the Cabinet:

Councillor: Tony Woods (Leader of the Council)
Councillors: Brendan Glynane, Sally Beardsworth, Richard Church,
               Trini Crake, Brian Hoare, Malcolm Mildren

Interim Chief Executive John Edwards

If you have any enquiries about this agenda please contact Annie May 01604 837355 or e mail amay@northampton.gov.uk

PORTFOLIOS OF CABINET MEMBERS

CABINET MEMBER	PORTFOLIO TITLE
Councillor A. Woods	Leader Partnership and Improvement
Councillor B. Glynane	Deputy Leader Community Engagement & Safety
Councillor S. Beardsworth	Housing
Councillor R. Church	Regeneration
Councillor T. Crake	Environment
Councillor B. Hoare	Performance
Councillor M. Mildren	Finance

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

SPECIAL CABINET

Your attendance is requested at a special meeting to be held in the Jeffery Room, the Guildhall on Tuesday, 25 September 2007 at 5:00 pm.

J. Edwards
Interim Chief Executive

AGENDA

1. APOLOGIES

2. MINUTES

3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

   Members of the public wishing to address the Cabinet must rregister their interest by 12 noon on the day of the meeting by contacting Annie May on 01604 837355 or by e mail to amay@northampton.gov.uk

4. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

5. ISSUES ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

   (A) REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP

   (copy to follow)

   (B) REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY VOLUNTARY SECTOR TASK AND FINISH GROUP

   (copy to follow)

6. EXTERNAL AUDITORS REPORT (FOLLOWING THE AUDIT OF THE STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS)

   Report of Director of Finance (copy to follow)

7. RE-PRESENTATION OF THE ACCOUNTS POST AUDIT

   Report of Director of Finance (copy to follow)

8. NBC PROGRESS ASSESSMENT SUMMER 2007

   Report of Interim Chief Executive (copy to follow)

9. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

   THE CHAIR TO MOVE:
   "THAT THE PUBLIC AND PRESS BE EXCLUDED FROM THE REMAINDER OF THE MEETING ON THE GROUNDS THAT THERE IS LIKELY TO BE DISCLOSURE TO THEM OF SUCH CATEGORIES OF EXEMPT INFORMATION AS DEFINED BY SECTION 100(1) OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AS LISTED AGAINST SUCH ITEMS OF BUSINESS BY REFERENCE TO THE APPROPRIATE PARAGRAPH OF SCHEDULE 12A TO SUCH ACT."

SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

**Exempted Under Schedule
12A of L.Govt Act 1972
Para No:-**

Northampton Borough Council
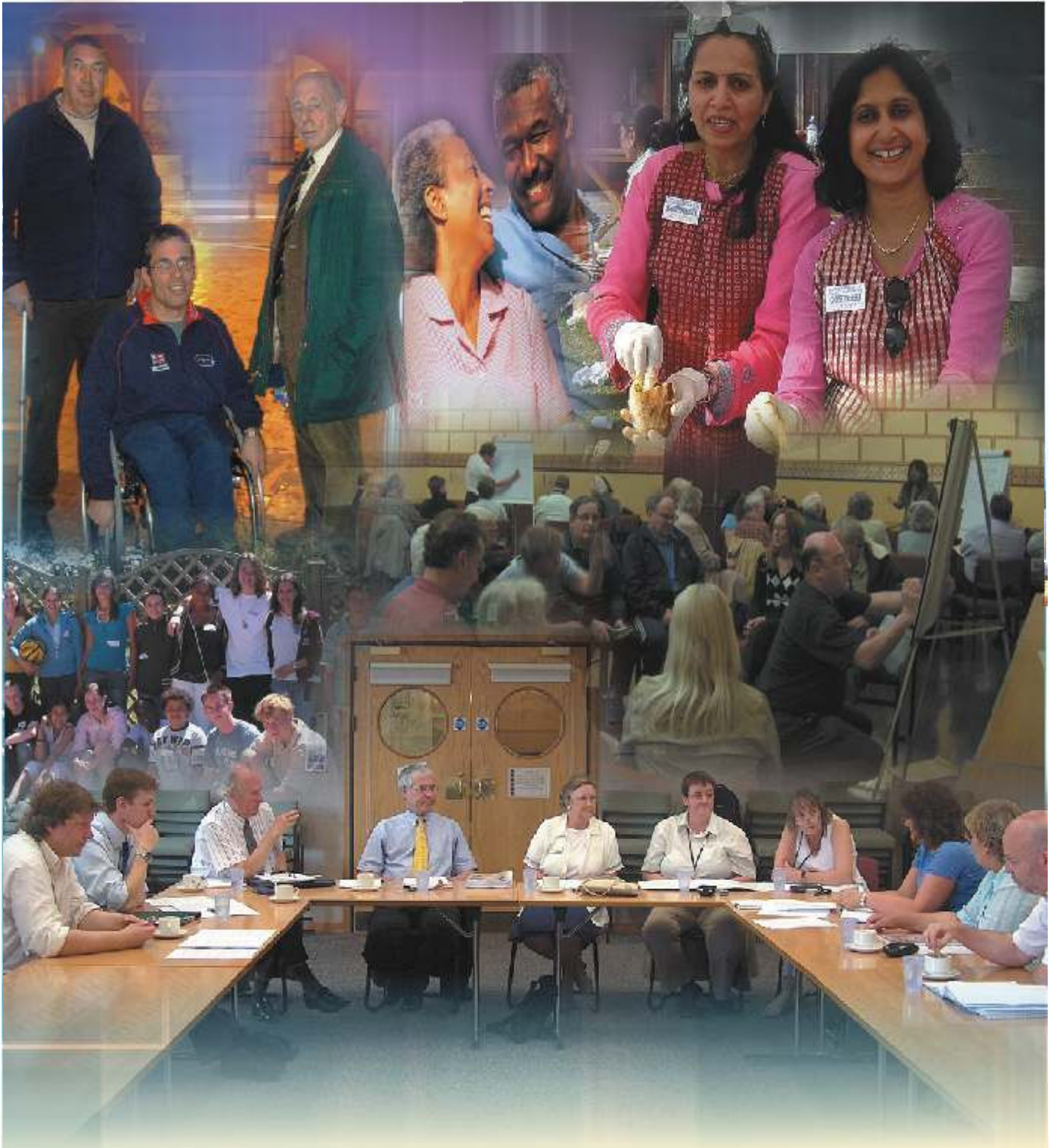
ADDENDUM

Cabinet 25th September 2007

Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Community Engagement Task and Finish Group

The attached report of the Community Engagement Task and Finish Group was considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 – Partnerships, Regeneration, Community Safety and Engagement on Wednesday the 12th September 2007.

The following recommendations were agreed to go forward to Cabinet for consideration and approval:

1. The recommendations, as approved by Cabinet of the previous report of the Public Engagement and Communications Task and Finish Group be carried out.

2. That the Cabinet considers new ways for the public to speak at Council meetings and that it clarifies the current position.

3. That reports to all Committees contain an implications paragraph on Community Engagement and Consultation. Meetings Services should act as the gatekeeper to ensure that all reports contain these details and reject any reports that do not contain the relevant information.

4. That, once published, the web-based resource of information on community engagement that is being produced by the organisation `Involve', be used by all departments when carrying out consultation.

5. That a Strategy for Community Engagement be devised which reflects organisational priorities and increased partnership working in accordance with the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)'s devolved structures. It should be recognised that this is an evolving area.

6. That as Portsmouth City Council's Consultation Toolkit has been recognised as an example of best practice this document be considered as a template for a Consultation Toolkit for borough council staff.

7. That for the public to be more trusting of the Council, it has to be open and transparent in reporting all of its activities. All public information should therefore be widely available and published.

8. That the mechanisms for receiving public feedback be examined and a policy produced. The mechanisms for reporting back from Neighbourhood Management need to ensure that information received is reported to the relevant Council departments and Councillors.

9. That the philosophy of Neighbourhood Management is extended across the whole town. Each area should have its own Communication/ Participation Plan that is resourced by the Council. Within this there should be a feedback mechanism.

10. That Neighbourhood Partnerships be fully resourced in order that their role can be enhanced and that they form part of each area's plan (as described in recommendation 9) should this be appropriate for that area; and that Northamptonshire County Council are urged to send representation to Neighbourhood Partnership meetings.

11. That Parish Councils be contacted and provided with details of the plans for Neighbourhood Management. It should be stated that where the Council is aware of any overlap of duties in an area where there is an active Parish Council; the Council would not wish to be involved but it would need to ensure that the Parish Council complies, for example by hosting public meetings, and furthermore signs up to the Council's Protocol if, after public consultation, a particular Parish Council did not want a Neighbourhood Partnership within their area. This will form part of the area's plan as described in recommendation 9.

12. That it be recognised that the Neighbourhood boundaries are not fixed and may need to be reviewed once sufficient evidence for change is established.

13. That the Council recognises that in order to consult with hard to reach groups it will have to consider how best to inform those in the community whose contact with the Council is minimal. These will include passive members of the community who have limited social engagement, members of the community for whom English is not their first language, members of the community who take a disinterest in the administration of Local Government. In order to reach these groups the Council should consider how to ensure that information written in clear, concise language can be delivered beyond people's front doors and/or is communicated to them via the social networks they are engaged in.

14. That a consultation budget be implemented. Analysis should take place to ascertain the amount of resource required.

15. That consideration be given to internal and external mediums for the consultation process to ensure that cost effective and modern forms of communication are considered.

To review the Council's engagement activities, including Neighbourhood Management

To review how community engagement could be improved and what groups the Council should be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new communities not currently represented

NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Community Engagement Task and Finish Group

SEPTEMBER 2007

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APPENDICES

Foreword

The Task and Finish Group covering 'Community Engagement' was established by Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 - "Partnerships, Regeneration, Community Safety and Engagement" in order to perform a short, focused review of how the Council might engage more comprehensively with the residents of Northampton; particularly new and emerging communities who are difficult to reach. Specific attention was paid to the role and function of Neighbourhood Management and Partnerships in achieving this objective.

The Task and Finish Group consisted of Councillors Paul Varnsverry (Chair), Tony Clarke, David Palethorpe and Portia Wilson, who considered both written and verbal evidence from a wide range of community groups - including residents' associations, religious organisations and parish councils - the council's community forums, the voluntary sector and officers of the council. Comments were invited on where the Council engages productively with communities and where greater efforts need to be made. This was complimented by a desktop based research study of best practice operated by councils from across the country widely acknowledged as success stories in the area of community engagement.

The work of the Task and Finish Group took place between July and September 2007.

The result is a comprehensive body of work which identifies areas where the Council needs to make change to achieve improved community engagement, with recommendations for how this should be done.

Councillor Paul Varnsverry
Chair of the Community Engagement Task and Finish Group

Acknowledgements to all those who took part in the Review:-

- Councillors Tony Clarke, David Palethorpe and Portia Wilson, who sat with me on the Task and Finish Group
- Councillors Brendan Glynane, Brian Markham and David Perkins for attending a meeting of the group and providing the benefit of their experience
- Mr. Chris Swinn, for speaking on rules regarding public addresses at Council meetings
- Thomas Hall (Corporate Manager), Lindsay Cameron (Participation Team Leader) and Lindsey Ambrose (Area Partnerships and Forums Co Ordinator) for giving evidence essential to the group achieving its objectives
- Tracy Tiff (Scrutiny Officer) for providing invaluable advice and helping compile the final report
- Simone Wade (Policy and Governance Manager) for her assistance with scoping the review and providing details of supporting work programmes

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Task and Finish Group was set up to review the Council's engagement activities, including Neighbourhood Management and to review how community engagement could be improved and what Groups the Council should be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new and difficult to reach communities who are not currently represented.

A significant amount of evidence was heard, details of which are contained in the report. After gathering evidence the Task and Finish Group established that: -

The Task and Finish Group recognises that the web-based resource of information on community engagement that is being produced by Involve, that has yet to be published, could be a useful tool for the Authority when carrying out consultation.

The Task and Finish Group realises the need for reports to Full Council, Cabinet and other Council meetings to contain an implications paragraph on Community Engagement and Consultation. There is a need for a gatekeeper to ensure that all reports contain these details.

The Council has spent resources on the development of numerous Strategies for Community Engagement and none have been fully resourced or implemented. The Borough's Strategy for Communications and Consultations which is published on the Council's Intranet site has not been approved.

Northampton Borough Council does not have a Consultation Toolkit. Portsmouth City Council's Consultation Toolkit has been recognised as an example of best practice and would provide a useful template for a Consultation Toolkit for the borough.

It is acknowledged that Overview and Scrutiny has a rigorous monitoring process and the Portfolio Holder is requested to provide a progress report six months after the report has been accepted by Cabinet and further monitoring is undertaken until all recommendations have been implemented. However, the Task and Finish Group feels that it needs to be emphasised that all Overview and Scrutiny Review reports be enacted and the accepted recommendations monitored.

There is a need to find ways to encourage citizens to speak at public council meetings. The Task and Finish Group challenges the culture and the Council's Constitution in relation to public speaking and how it impacts on the Council's image.

The Council appears to be in defensive mode and often buries bad news stories rather than publish them. It is acceptable for the Council to report that as an authority it has failed and to accept and acknowledge any mistakes made.

A lot of citizens have expressed concern at the loss of Area Partnerships and there is a need to demonstrate that momentum has not been lost for example Neighbourhood Managed Area meetings should be held quarterly.

Amongst all options that should be considered to improve public consultation consideration should be given to both internal and external support for the consultation process including examining all forms of communication, for example, pre recorded telephone calls, texts.

The Task and Finish Group feels that it needs to be recognised that the Neighbourhood boundaries are not fixed and may need to be reviewed once sufficient evidence for change is established. These boundaries may change and evolve.

The Task and Finish Group recognises the important part that Neighbourhood Partnerships both managed (with officer support) and unmanaged (self run) will continue to play in the Council's Community Engagement Strategy.   There is a need for each area (managed and unmanaged) to have its own Communication/Participation Plan that is resourced by the Council. Feedback mechanisms need to include regular reports to the relevant Council departments, and whilst managed areas have coordinators in place the Council needs to ensure that all areas, managed and unmanaged, have support to enable the development and implementation of a Community Engagement Strategy and the plans within each co-ordinated area.

The Task and Finish Group suggested that, where the Council is aware of any overlap of duties between those of a Neighbourhood Partnership, and those of a Parish Council, in areas where there is an <u>active</u> Parish Council which would prefer <u>not</u> to see a Neighbourhood Partnership within their area; as long as the Parish Council signs up to and complies with the Council's Prototcol, for example by hosting public meetings, the Council should state that the Parish Council will undertake the function and role of the Neighbourhood Partnership   This may necessitate, after consultation, a change to Neighbourhood boundaries as in 4.10 above.

In order for the Council to carry out effective consultations there is a need for a budget specific for consultation exercises.

Comment was made from some of the expert witnesses that the Council needs to do more to engage with hard to reach groups.

The above overall findings have formed the basis for the following recommendations.

The Task and Finish Group requests that all of the recommendations detailed below are implemented in order that the improvements that this Task and Finish Group seeks can be delivered:

RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1   That reports to all Committees contain an implications paragraph   on Community Engagement and Consultation. Meetings Services should act as the gatekeeper to ensure that all reports contain these details and reject any reports that do not contain the relevant information.

5.2   That, once published, the web-based resource of information on community engagement that is being produced by the organisation `Involve', be used by all departments when carrying out consultation.

5.3   That a Strategy for Community Engagement be devised which reflects organisational priorities and increased partnership working in accordance with the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)'s devolved structures. It should be recognised that this is an evolving area.

5.4   That as Portsmouth City Council's Consultation Toolkit has been recognised as an example of best practice (Copy attached at Appendix F) this document be considered as a template for a Consultation Toolkit for borough Council staff.

5.5   That for the public to be more trusting of the Council, it has to be open and transparent in reporting all of its activities. All public information should therefore be widely available and published.

5.6   That the mechanisms for receiving public feedback be examined and a policy produced. The mechanisms for reporting back from Neighbourhood Management need to ensure that information received is reported to the relevant Council departments and Councillors.

5.7   That the philosophy of Neighbourhood Management is extended across the whole town. Each area should have its own Communication/Participation Plan that is resourced by the Council. Within this there should be a feedback mechanism.

5.8   That Neighbourhood Partnerships be fully resourced in order that their role can be enhanced and that they form part of each area's plan (as described in recommendation 5.7) should this be appropriate for that area.

5.9   That Parish Councils be contacted and provided with details of the plans for Neighbourhood Management. It should be stated that where the Council is aware of any overlap of duties and in that area there is an active Parish Council that the Parish Council complies, for example by hosting public meetings. The Council would not wish to be involved but it would need to ensure that Parish Councils sign up to its Protocol if a particular Parish Council, after public consultation, did not want a Neighbourhood Partnership within their area. This will form part of the area's plan as described in recommendation 5.7.

5.10 That it be recognised that the Neighbourhood boundaries are not fixed and may need to be reviewed once sufficient evidence for change is established.

5.11 That the Council recognises that in order to consult with hard to reach groups it will have to consider how best to inform those in the community whose contact with the Council is minimal. These will include passive members of the community who have limited social engagement, members of the community for whom English is not their first language, members of the community who take a disinterest in the administration of Local Government. In order to reach these groups the Council should consider how to ensure that information written in clear, concise language can be delivered beyond people's front doors and/or is communicated to them via the social networks they are engaged in.

5.12 That a consultation budget be implemented. Analysis should take place to ascertain the amount of resource required.

5.13 That consideration be given to internal and external mediums for the consultation process to ensure that cost effective and modern forms of communication are considered.

Northampton Borough Council

Overview and Scrutiny

Report of the Community Engagement Task and Finish Group

1.   Purpose

1.1   The purpose of the Task and Finish Group was to review the Council's engagement activities, including Neighbourhood Management and to review how community engagement could be improved and what Groups the Council should be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new and difficult to reach communities who are not currently represented.

1.2   A copy of the Scope of the Review is attached at Appendix A.

2.   Context and Background

2.1   A Councillor Task and Finish Group was established. There were no co-opted members for this review. However the Group realised the need for all Task and Finish Groups to consider the provision of an external advisor.

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

- An analysis of the Council's current method of engagement, including successes and failures of engaging with the community
- A synopsis of all information currently available
- Officer reports/presentations
- Maps showing how areas are currently geographically split
- Best practice external to Northampton
- Witness interviews/evidence

2.3   This review links to the Council's corporate priorities as it demonstrates listening to local people and providing the services that they need. (Corporate Priority 1 refers)

3.   Evidence Collection

In scoping this review it was decided that evidence would be collected from a variety of sources:

3.1   **Expert Witnesses**

3.1.1   Core questions were devised and issued to all witnesses providing evidence to the review. A summary of all written responses is detailed below. Copies of all written evidence received is attached at Appendix B. A copy of the core questions is attached at Appendix C.

3.1.2 Key points of evidence: -

- The Council does not consult very well with specific groups, e.g. Residents Associations, often they read about consultation exercises in the local press
- The Budget Consultation 2007/2008 was good but little else is
- There is often short notice for feedback which causes problems as most Groups meet just once a month. Many Residents' Associations have newsletters which could include consultation questionnaires
- Very few people attend Area Partnership meetings. The Council has attempted a fair consultation process, for example, the Budget Setting Consultation, but this only reach a small proportion of residents
- The Council does consult with Community Groups particularly in the neighbourhood renewal role. Overall a more hands on approach is needed
- Some very small groups feel left out and therefore do not respond
- The Council consults fairly well on major issues
- The Council's current community engagement practices make it relatively easy for highly motivated and experienced people to engage with the Council, but difficult for those who are less informed or less motivated. The Council has forums and area structures which play an important role, but with limited numbers of largely 'self selecting' people
- There has been inconsistency from consultation to consultation due to the obvious lack of strategy, protocols and rules of engagement
- Northampton Federation of Residents' Associations could be used better, for example, information sent to it in advance then presentation and feedback given at a meeting
- The consultation mechanism could be improved by direct contact and visits to organisations, events and meetings. Regular contact must be maintained so that they feel their needs and views are valued
- Not all Community Groups are adequately consulted
- Groups specially singled-out for communication should include Parish Councils, Residents' Associations, and Neighbourhood Watch Groups, as members of such organisations are in touch with any problems occurring in their communities, and also keep abreast of local opinion.
- The Council consults the Community Safety Partnership on matters relating to Community Safety and Crime with the context of the Partnership itself. The partnership has itself limited direct engagement with its communities.
- All Groups that are registered with the Council should be notified of forthcoming consultations
- There is a need for major publicity drive for consultation
- Consultation in itself is insufficient. Residents must have feedback on their observations and feel that their voices are being
- It would be beneficial to have a Residents Liaison Officer, which would ensure strong links between the Residents' Groups and the Council.
- Local Councillors do attend Residents' Association meetings but a Liaison Officer would provide more ready access and would allow more mobility with common problems in different areas being readily identified
- There should be more consultation with Disabled Groups and Disabled people

- In the area of Community Safety, the Council struggles to engage with hard to reach groups and new emerging communities. There is little evidence of engagement with these communities and little collection of data that enables the 'real picture' to be obtained. Attempts at regular contact with community groups should be evidenced. Groups consulted should include the 'geographic' as well as the 'special interest'
- Neighbourhood Partnerships do not work. They seem to discuss the same issues and no progress is made. Other Agencies rarely attend
- Neighbourhood Partnerships is a mechanism to let people air their views but nothing appears to be done as an outcome
- Neighbourhood Management has not been adequately explained to most Groups. Therefore the importance of sending representatives to the first meetings was not recognised
- Neighbourhood Management is too big and meetings are not open to the general public
- Neighbourhood Management is in its embryonic stage and is untried and untested but there could be a huge problem in the lack of common model between the different Neighbourhood Managed Areas
- There would appear to be an attempt to engage with interested parties but often the organisations that need to engage are often less than enthusiastic about the consultation
- Neighbourhood Management and Partnerships work very well with all Agencies working together. It is important for there to be a Working Group in place after the project has concluded in order to maintain and sustain the work that has been carried out
- The two-tier structure of neighbourhood engagement is causing problems. Area partnerships in the managed areas have ceased to exist, and their replacement is unclear. In the non-managed areas there is a feeling of resentment and uncertainty, coupled with anger at the lack of engagement of the County Council.
- Neighbourhood managed areas have been chosen on the basis of pockets of deprivation and then expanded to create a critical mass population. Neighbourhood Management Area (NMA) Boards - appear to be officer dominated feudal fiefdoms of self appointed, selected and un-elected members of certain but not all Resident Associations that have no democratic mandate that meet in secret in closed meetings to which the residents at large are not invited
- All groups and individuals should be invited to participate, some will attend, others may use the website and others may prefer to complete questionnaires. Contact stalls such as those used at Milton Keynes would be a good way to consult
- The Council should locate and visit all the meetings of all Community Groups
- While consultation has been undertaken in the Neighbourhood management priority areas to determine those communities' priorities, it is still in its infancy and a robust two way engagement process is still to be finalised. It has also suffered from lack of continuity with managers to take this issue forward. To work, the community will need to get to know and trust their local neighbourhood manager, and they need to be empowered to influence decision-making at the local level

- Due to strategic changes with the Council over the past year or so, resident representation has failed to continue on various groups such as Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Strategic Partnerships. Resident representation is the essential key to making residents of Northampton secure in the knowledge that their voice is being heard and listened to
- If encouraged, 'new communities' will engage. They often do via Legal Rights forums, Refugee forums and similar. The Council should establish where they do engage, then go to them, not always expect them to come to us
- Quite often groups are only consulted when it suits the case or when there is an outcry regarding a particularly sensitive issue. There needs to be standards and processes in place to allow the community to be consulted on many more matters that affect the general public with more openness and accountability.
- Area Partnership Meetings and CASPAR Meetings, usually have a selection of local Councillors, and quite often Council employees in attendance. These meetings are not publicised sufficiently, and more members of the general public should be notified of the existence of these meetings, and encouraged to attend.

3.1.3   Various witnesses were invited to attend a meeting and provide evidence: -

3.1.3.1   Corporate Manager (Community Safety, Leisure and Town Centre Operations)

The Corporate Manager (Community Safety, Leisure and Town Centre Operations) attended the meeting on 13 August 2007 (A copy of the minutes of that meeting is attached at Appendix G)

Key points of evidence: -

- The Council undertakes consultation both with geographic groups – neighbourhoods for example – and sectoral groups. This happens mainly when there are specific issues relating to those groups, rather than using them to get views on general issues. A consistency or co-ordination to this is lacking, either in when it is done or how quality is ensured.

- It will always be easier for the Council to make links with groups that are more self-aware, usually well established and articulate, and may be localised.

  - Systematic – the Council's consultation should be planned with a purpose and integrated into other planning and decision-making processes

  - Quality – consultation needs to be thought through and delivered well by people who understand the issues and pitfalls. But it also needs to give value for money, and the benefits from doing it should be spelled out in advance, along with the costs

- Culture – The Council does not yet always see consultation (still less engagement) as a positive way of improving what we do, to be welcomed

- Consultation could be improved by the Council having a bank of accessible knowledge for consultation that it could confidently rely upon the results.

- There is a need for feedback to be given to those who participate in consultation.

- it will be the more established individuals and groups who will fit most easily into Neighbourhood Management (NM) structures unless the Council makes a determined effort to reach beyond them.

- The geographical approach of NM supplemented with the 'sectoral' approach based on factors like age, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, gender is right. The Council should be able to engage with those who are 'hard to hear' but also encourage communities which have organised themselves to have a part.

- The other groups which the Council may be in danger of ignoring are the non-residents, particularly businesses and those who work or play in the town.

3.1.3.4 Ward Councillor for Eastfield

The ward Councillor for Eastfield attended the meeting on 13 August 2007 and provided a response to the Task and Finish Group's core questions. (A copy of the minutes of that meeting is attached at Appendix G).

Key points of evidence:

- Consultation and Engagement are often treated as being the same thing. They are not.

- The Council has over recent years been keen to improve both consultation and engagement but this work has been left to a small number of, sometimes excellent, people but is not embedded through out the organisation.

- Community Groups may be consulted but "*Are their views able to influence outcomes?*" may be a better question.

- By devoting more time to both information and consultation but being clear which is which would improve the Council's consultation mechanisms.

- The Borough and partners have signed up to developing a Neighbourhood Management model for both engaging the community and for delivery of improvement of services as identified in the LAA. Yet

there appears to be little coordination between the various Managed Areas and Coordinated Areas.

- The Council should be seeking to engage everyone not groups or sections of society.

3.1.3.5 Area Partnerships and Forums Co-Ordinator

The Borough Council's Area Partnerships and Forums Co-Ordinator attended the meeting on 23 August 2007 (A copy of the minutes of that meeting is attached at Appendix H).

The Key points of evidence were: -

- The Youth Forum is acknowledged as a high flyer in the county.
- The Disabled People's Forum has been involved, along with others, in the statutory consultation required to devise a Disability Equality Scheme. The engagement would be better in future if the Forum's objectives were to specify a responsibility around this.
- The Pensioners Forum recently made links to countywide working through Northamptonshire County Council's Active Ageing Network and Northants Older People's Advisory Group; Older People's Champion for NBC now a member; it would be better to have more direct links to the Local Area Agreement.
- The Lesbian Gay and Bi Sexual (LGB) People's Forum and NIAG (Northampton Inter-Agency Group - Hate Crimes Forum) is strong in a 'representative' way, but relies heavily on a currently mostly unfunded relationship with Northampton Lesbian Gay and Bisexual Peoples Association (NLGBA) to work well.
- The Race Equality Forum and MAGRAH (Multi Agency Group Against Racial Harassment) - The development of Northampton Borough Council's Race Equality Scheme has been much more officer-owned than that of the disability equality scheme, so the forum has had little inputs – just periodically heard updates and been able to comment. Progress towards the Equality Standard has also been slow over past years.
- The Women's Forum has lacked clear objectives and terms of references. Its meetings have been poorly attended. The Agenda-style lunchtime `minutes meetings' is not engaging with a broad spectrum of women.
- The Council could make better use of its existing engagement and consultation mechanisms.
- The Council needs to do more planning about how, when and why to involve residents via Neighbourhood Partnerships and Forums.
- The Council's consultation mechanisms could be improved by putting a simple web page on the NBC web pages that links to the various types of meeting we have and explaining rules for attendance, speaking, handing in petitions and letters.
- When the Council carries out surveys it would be good if it could improve its questionnaires.

- Use plain English wherever possible. Check it is not only plain but also right for different groups by asking Forums to check over draft documents.
- There is a need to create safe spaces for particular communities of interest to be able to engage in person too to discuss in more detail issues re disability, sexuality. There is the need for a structure which has Forums, Neighbourhood Managed Areas and Neighbourhood Partnerships working more closely and awareness of this with Northamptonshire County Council across its service areas.
- The Council should be working in the localities and also through town-wide forums to engage effectively
- There should be customer service standards in respect of following up action points from meetings by the officers who attend them

3.1.3.6 Vice Chair, Northampton Tenants and Council Together, (NTACT)

The Vice Chair, NTACT, submitted a written response to the Task and Finish Group's core questions (Copy attached at Appendix C) and attended the meeting on 23 August 2007 to provide comment on public speaking at Council meetings.

The main points of evidence were:-

- Up until September 2006 citizens had had the right to address Full Council on any agenda item. This right had now been removed.
- The public can now only address Full Council on Motions.
- Citizens may wish to address Full Council meetings under the agenda item `Portfolio Holder Presentations' and Policy items.
- The Council should welcome input from residents and visitors to the town and make information readily available.
- All information should be published, including `poor' information,
- Many Councillors now do not hold surgeries.
- Area Partnerships were a failure and there is a need for Councillors to engage at `grass roots level.' For example that in Australia, Street Committees are held before the reports are discussed by the Local Council.
- At Mayor Making on 24 May 2007, the Monitoring Officer put Political Structures on the agenda without prior notification and the public had no opportunity to address Full Council because it was 'Invitation Only'. The legal requirement is to publish an agenda five working days prior to the meeting. If a report is not available at the time of agenda dispatch it should be deferred to the next meeting.
- The deadline for submission of written questions by the public is often exceeded by the production of the very papers upon which they are expected to raise questions.

3.1.3.7 Member of the Constitutional Working Party

A member of the Constitutional Working Party provided details of the reasoning and decision for the Public Speaking Protocol that was introduced in September 2006.

The main points were:-

- The Constitutional Working Party was charged with the responsibility of providing recommendations to update the Councils constitution and was appointed in the light of the "Poor" status given to Northampton Borough Council following the Audit Commissions Comprehensive Performance Assessment report in 2004/5. It was acknowledged that part of the problem was to update the workings of Council, Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny.

- It was agreed by all the party representatives on the Working Group that democratic engagement was to be encouraged but it was also recognised that in the past the way in which the public had been allowed to engage at these meetings had resulted in meetings being hijacked to the point where the business of the Council was being disrupted.

- It was recognised that the authority of the Council had been diminished by repeated meetings where important statutory reports had been tabled for discussion at Council but had either not been discussed or limited discussion had taken place due to lack of time. Quite often the reason for this was that precedence was given to debating political motions rather than the statutory business of Council. The all party working group acknowledged that for the Council to improve its "Poor" status it was essential to change the way these meetings were conducted whilst at the same time preserving the right for the community to engage with the elected representatives.

- The following was therefore agreed:

- *Council*

- A half hour slot is included at the early part of the Council agenda for the public to put questions to Council. A notice period is required for such questions. If any questions are unanswered at the end of this period a written response is be provided.

- Motions will be debated after Council business has been attended too and the public will have the right to speak to motions on giving the appropriate notice.

- Prior to the Council meeting, if the party whips and leaders agreed that an issue had emerged which was of such interest to the public that to allow it to be debated during a Council meeting would result in

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insufficient time being available for a) the issue to be aired probably and b) for the Council to conclude its own business, then a separate public meeting will be organised at the earliest possible time to enable the issue to be debated.

- *Cabinet*

- The right of the public to speak at cabinet was retained subject to the appropriate notice being given of the desire to speak. A limit of 3 minutes was given for each speaker.

- *Overview and Scrutiny*

- The right of the public to speak at Overview and Scrutiny was retained. Prior notice is not required and members of the public who wish to speak to the committee would indicate to the chairman.

3.2   Policy and Governance Manager

3.2.1 The Policy and Governance Manager provided baseline data on: -

3.2.1 Background to Community Engagement in the Borough

3.2.2.1 Northampton Borough Council (NBC) has very recently moved from Area Partnerships to a new way of working in partnership with Northants Police and Northamptonshire County Council. In line with recommendations from Central Government about working in neighbourhoods, the local area working has been revised down to small groupings of residents, a total of 13 in all. The major determinant for the boundaries is the new structure for delivery of Police Services, with areas seeking to be co-terminal with the areas covered by the new Safer Communities Police Teams. The amount of Police service inputs and other service inputs now aligns to these delineated areas, with six areas of more deprivation and Policing issues receiving higher levels of service under a 'managed' area approach with an individual Neighbourhood Management Co-Ordinator. These six areas and partnership working in them relate also to obligations and objectives of partnership working under the Local Area Agreement. There is a general ambition for other areas of Northampton to ultimately develop more enhanced 'local' focus of service provision.

3.2.2.2 NBC completed a Service Review of Forums and Area Partnerships in autumn 2006. As a Community Strategy is produced further details of the review will become available.

3.2.2.4 NBC has very recently decided to share Northamptonshire County Council's Customer Panel for consultations.

3.2.2.5 NBC has supported the Voluntary and Community Sector Forum.

3.2.2.6 NBC has supported the community through grants funding. This is now due to be reviewed as per a public commitment by Councillor Tim Hadland,

following complaints from the community about the existing structure and handling of community grants in spring 2007.

3.2.2.7 Map detailing the geographical area of Neighbourhood Partnerships

3.2.2.8.1A map detailing the geographical area of Neighbourhood Partnerships was provided. Details of which can be located on the Council's website www.northampton.gov.uk

3.3   Scrutiny Officer

3.3.1   The Scrutiny Officer provided baseline information on: -

3.3.1.1Groups that the Council currently engages with

3.3.1.2 To find out which Groups and Communities the Council currently engages with contact was made with various Council departments.

3.3.1.2   The list below is not exhaustive but should include the majority of groups that the Council regularly consults and engages with: -

- o Disabled people via the Disabled Peoples Forum
- o Gay, Lesbian and Bi-Sexual people (Lesbian, Gay and Bi-Sexual Peoples Forum)
- o Members of the Race Equality Forum
- o Young People through the Youth Forum
- o Older people via the Pensioners Forum
- o Council Tenants through Northampton Tenants and Council Together (NTACT). Tenants are also individually consulted.
- o Local people via the Neighbourhood Partnerships and Local Residents Associations
- o Parish Councils
- o Local Retailers via the Town Centre Partnership
- o St David's Neighbourhood Management Board and the Thorplands, Rectory Farm and Lumbertubs Neighbourhood Management Board
- o Thorplands Community Co-Op
- o Thorplands Football Club
- o Bellinge Community House
- o Bellinge CASPAR Plus
- o Blackthorn Good Neighbours
- o Store House Church/ Lodge Farm Management Committee
- o Age Concern
- o Need to know shop, Kings Heath
- o Semilong Community Forum
- o Jesus Fellowship
- o Young Mens' Christian Association (YMCA)
- o Religious Organisations through the Faith Forum and through Mayoralty events including
- o Royal British Legion
- o Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SAFFA)
- • Northampton Federation of Townswomen's Guild
- • Allotment Associations

- Disabled Interests – Ability Northants
- Health Service
- Emergency Services
- Conservation Action Communities
- Various Organisations such as: -
    The Wantage Gospel Trust
    Princes Foundation
    Northampton Friends of the Earth
    River Nene Regional Park
    The Wildlife Trust
    Gypsy and Traveller Law Reform Coalition
    East Midlands Sports
    Northamptonshire Racial Equality Council
    Northampton Women's Aid
    Northampton Door to Door Service (NDDS)
- Other Ethnic Minority Community Groups, including: -
    Asian Men Sports & Social Club
    Indian Hindu Welfare Organisation
    (IHWO)
    African Carribbean Elders Society
    Council for Ethnic Minorities Communities
    (Northampton)
    Northampton Connolly
- Voluntary Interests, including:-
    Northampton Landlords' Association
    Friends of Bradlaugh Fields
    Northampton Rail Users Group
    Northampton & Lamport Railway
    Northamptonshire Environmental Forum
    Nene Flood Prevention Alliance
    SOS Campaign
- Local Scout / Girl Guide Brownie packs including:

    - Thrapston Brownies
    - St Paul's Cubs & Scout Group
    - Weston Favell Cubs
    - 22nd Whitehills Scout Group
    - 29th Sunnyside Scout Group

- Duston Luncheon Club
- Go Getters Club
- Simon de Senlis Court (Sheltered Housing Group)
- St John's Rest Home
- St Andrew's Church group
- Cameleon Writers Group
- D Day Dodgers (Re Enactment Group)
- Sealed Knot (Re Enactment Group)
- Tommy Atkins Society
- Northamptonshire Black History Association
- Looking Glass Theatre
- Alliston Gardens Community Centre, Semilong

- Spring Boroughs Community Group
- Northampton General Hospital Outreach Group
- Nene Adults with Learning Difficulties Group
- Bosworth Independent College -
- Evacuee Reunion Association
- National Autistic Society - Northamptonshire Branch

3.3.1.2 Glossary of Terms

3.3.1.2.1 The Borough Council's Strategy for Communications and Consultations states in its criteria section: -

`Criteria Two

3.1 Clear
Use plain language: avoid jargon and only use technical terms where absolutely necessary. A consultation should be as accessible as possible. Explain complicated concepts as clearly as possible and, where there are technical terms, use a glossary.

3.3.1.2.2 Overview and Scrutiny has produced an Overview and Scrutiny Toolkit and Guidance Booklet for Co-Opted members. Within these documents a glossary of terms is included. Attached at Appendix D is the glossary of terms contained in the Co-Optee Guidance Booklet.

3.3.1.2.3 The Area Partnerships and Co-Ordinator uses a `Council Speak Bingo Card' that contains a glossary of Council terminology for young people on the Youth Forum .One copy of the card is cut up to make counters similar to a Bingo game, while blocking out six squares randomly on cards that are given one each to the young people. The young people are then asked what they think that the terms mean and then explain and discuss what each is. It is reported to have been popular. The winner receives a youth festival T-shirt for completing their Bingo card first. A copy of a Bingo Card is attached at Appendix E.

3.3.1.2.4 As an example from another Local Authority, attached at Appendix F is the glossary of terms contained in the Leicestershire Partnership's Community Engagement and Communication Strategy. This Strategy has been commended as an example of best practice.

3.4 Looking at Best Practice and other Local Authorities

3.4.1 Local Authorities

3.4.1.1 Desktop research was carried out with a number of Local Authorities and other organisations regarding their community engagement processes

3.4.1.2 The following Local Authorities were contacted:

- Liverpool City Council
- Portsmouth City Council
- Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
- Southampton City Council
- Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council
- Vale Royal Borough Council

- Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
- Salford City Council
- Newcastle City Council

3.4.1.3 Other information was obtained via the Internet and the Audit Commission's website.

3.4.1.4 Involve

3.4.1.5 The organisation, Involve, has been commissioned to create a web-based resource of information on community engagement, but as yet this is not published. Once published this could be a useful tool for Local Authorities when carrying out consultation. The website for Involve is www.involve.org.

Key Points:-

3.4.1.6 Liverpool City Council

Liverpool City Council has developed a Consultation Strategy that guides service managers when consulting with their service users, and includes guidance on how to reach seldom heard groups. The Council has a link with the Liverpool Community Network (LCN) who supports it reaching these Groups. LCN is part of the local CVS and it has several network groups set up to represent various Groups, including disabled people, Black, Minority and Ethnic Groups (BME), Lesbians, Bi Sexual and Gay people (LGB), young people and faith groups etc. It has a market research team who conducts some of the consultation exercises but the Council also engages with consultants for some pieces of consultation.

The Council is currently at level 2 (the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA) equality Mark Certificate) for its Equality Standard for Local Government its community engagement and is working towards level 3.

3.4.1.7 Portsmouth City Council

Together We Can is a Government Campaign to bring Government and people closer together, encouraging public bodies to do more to enable people to influence local decisions. It is led by Communities and Local Government and is closely linked to the Local Government White Paper's aim of giving local people and local communities more influence and power to improve their lives.

Together We Can commends Portsmouth City Council's Consultation Toolkit as award winning. It is designed for Local Authority practitioners working in the Portsmouth area but the high quality of the guide means that it can be easily adapted to any type of Local Authority consultation.

It is reported that the document is an accessibly written and concise guide to undertaking successfully community consultation, and seeks to practically

address potential pitfalls by providing clear, thorough advice and checklists for practitioners. The checklists are especially useful for staff that are new to consultation.

A copy of Portsmouth City Council's Consultation Toolkit is attached at Appendix F.

3.4.1.8 Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC)

RMBC is amongst the first group of Local Authorities nationally to be awarded the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA) Equality Mark Certificate for achieving level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. The Council uses many and varied methods of consulting and involving communities. The Council's Consultation and Community Involvement Strategy was highlighted as good practice by the auditors who validated its level 3 achievement.

RMBC reports that it has a good working relationship with an umbrella organisation that represents may BME Organisations in Rotherham. Through its support it was able to carry out specific consultations for example with BME women, elders, young people, Pakistani, Kashmiri, Yemeni communities. Consultants were not employed; the work was undertaken entirely in-house.

3.4.1.9 Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council (KMBC)

KMBC has been awarded three stars for its Neighbourhood Management Process.

The website for the Neighbourhood Partnership working is very comprehensive.

The Council's Community Area Forums have now been replaced by new arrangements, which came into force following the Council's Annual General Meeting in May 2005.

The new approach improves consultation, action planning and delivery at local level.

It needs to make sure that its local neighbourhoods and communities benefit from this by:-

- having a more focussed Partnership approach at local level

- giving local communities a clear role

- ensuring services are more effectively targeted

- producing real and lasting improvements

- strengthening local accountability

Regular press releases are issued in relation to the neighbourhood partnership meetings.

4.   **Conclusions**

After all of the evidence was collated the following conclusions were drawn:

4.1   The Task and Finish Group recognises that the web-based resource of information on community engagement that is being produced by Involve, that has yet to be published, could be a useful tool for the Authority when carrying out consultation.

4.2   The Task and Finish Group realises the need for reports to Full Council, Cabinet and other Council meetings to contain an implications paragraph on Community Engagement and Consultation. There is a need for a gatekeeper to ensure that all reports contain these details.

4.3   The Council has spent resources on the development of numerous Strategies for Community Engagement and none have been fully resourced or implemented. The Borough's Strategy for Communications and Consultations which is published on the Council's Intranet site has not been approved.

4.4   Northampton Borough Council does not have a Consultation Toolkit. Portsmouth City Council's Consultation Toolkit has been recognised as an example of best practice and would provide a useful template for a Consultation Toolkit for the borough.

4.5   It is acknowledged that Overview and Scrutiny has a rigorous monitoring process and the Portfolio Holder is requested to provide a progress report six months after the report has been accepted by Cabinet and further monitoring is undertaken until all recommendations have been implemented. However, the Task and Finish Group feels that it needs to be emphasised that all Overview and Scrutiny Review reports be enacted and the accepted recommendations monitored.

4.6   There is a need to find ways to encourage citizens to speak at public council meetings. The Task and Finish Group challenges the culture and the Council's Constitution in relation to public speaking and how it impacts on the Council's image.

4.7   The Council appears to be in defensive mode and often buries bad news stories rather than publish them. It is acceptable for the Council to report that as an authority it has failed and to accept and acknowledge any mistakes made.

4.8   A lot of citizens have expressed concern at the loss of Area Partnerships and there is a need to demonstrate that momentum has not been lost; for example Neighbourhood Managed Area meetings should be held quarterly.

4.9   Amongst all options that should be considered to improve public consultation consideration should be given to both internal and external support for the consultation process including examining all forms of communication, for example, pre recorded telephone calls, texts.

4.10   The Task and Finish Group feels that it needs to be recognised that the Neighbourhood boundaries are not fixed and may need to be reviewed once sufficient evidence for change is established. These boundaries may change and evolve.

4.11   The Task and Finish Group recognises the important part that Neighbourhood Partnerships both managed (with officer support) and unmanaged (self run) will continue to play in the Council's Community Engagement Strategy. There is a need for each area (managed and unmanaged) to have its own Communication/Participation Plan that is resourced by the Council. Feedback mechanisms need to include regular reports to the relevant Council departments, and whilst managed areas have coordinators in place the Council needs to ensure that all areas, managed and unmanaged, have support to enable the development and implementation of a Community Engagement Strategy and the plans within each co-ordinated area.

4.12   The Task and Finish Group suggested that, where the Council is aware of any overlap of duties between those of a Neighbourhood Partnership, and those of a Parish Council, in areas where there is an <u>active</u> Parish Council which would prefer <u>not</u> to see a Neighbourhood Partnership within their area; as long as the Parish Council signs up to and complies with the Council's Prototcol, for example by hosting public meetings, the Council should state that the Parish Council will undertake the function and role of the Neighbourhood Partnership This may necessitate, after consultation, a change to Neighbourhood boundaries as in 4.10 above.

4.13   In order for the Council to carry out effective consultations there is a need for a budget specific for consultation exercises.

4.14   Comment was made from some of the expert witnesses that the Council needs to do more to engage with hard to reach groups.

5.   Recommendations

The Task and Finish Group requests that all of the recommendations detailed below are implemented in order that the improvements that this Task and Finish Group seeks can be delivered:

5.1   That reports to all Committees contain an implications paragraph   on Community Engagement and Consultation. Meetings Services should act as the gatekeeper to ensure that all reports contain these details and reject any reports that do not contain the relevant information.

5.2   That, once published, the web-based resource of information on community engagement that is being produced by the organisation `Involve', be used by all departments when carrying out consultation.

5.3   That a Strategy for Community Engagement be devised which reflects organisational priorities and increased partnership working in accordance with the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) devolved structures. It should be recognised that this is an evolving area.

5.4   That as Portsmouth City Council's Consultation Toolkit has been recognised as an example of best practice (Copy attached at Appendix F) this document be considered as a template for a Consultation Toolkit for borough Council staff.

5.5   That for the public to be more trusting of the Council, it has to be open and transparent in reporting all of its activities. All public information should therefore be widely available and published.

5.6   That the mechanisms for receiving public feedback be examined and a policy produced. The mechanisms for reporting back from Neighbourhood Management need to ensure that information received is reported to the relevant Council departments and Councillors.

5.7   That the philosophy of Neighbourhood Management is extended across the whole town. Each area should have its own Communication/Participation Plan that is resourced by the Council. Within this there should be a feedback mechanism.

5.8   That Neighbourhood Partnerships be fully resourced in order that their role can be enhanced and that they form part of each area's plan (as described in recommendation 5.7) should this be appropriate for that area.

5.9   That Parish Councils be contacted and provided with details of the plans for Neighbourhood Management. It should be stated that where the Council is aware of any overlap of duties and in that area there is an active Parish Council that the Parish Council complies, for example by hosting public meetings. The Council would not wish to be involved but it would need to ensure that Parish Councils sign up to its Protocol if a particular Parish Council, after public consultation, did not want a Neighbourhood Partnership within their area. This will form part of the area's plan as described in recommendation 5.7.

5.10   That it be recognised that the Neighbourhood boundaries are not fixed and may need to be reviewed once sufficient evidence for change is established.

5.11   That the Council recognises that in order to consult with hard to reach groups it will have to consider how best to inform those in the community whose contact with the Council is minimal. These will include passive members of the community who have limited social engagement, members of the community for whom English is not their first language and members of the community who take a disinterest in the administration of Local Government. In order to reach these groups the Council should consider how to ensure that information written in clear, concise language can be delivered beyond people's front doors and/or is communicated to them via the social networks they are engaged in.

5.12   That a consultation budget be implemented. Analysis should take place to ascertain the amount of resource required.

5.13   That consideration be given to internal and external mediums for the consultation process to ensure that cost effective and modern forms of communication are considered.

Appendices

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
TASK AND FINISH GROUP

1. Purpose/Objectives of the Review

- To review the Council's engagement activities, including Neighbourhood Management.

- To review how community engagement could be improved and what Groups the Council should be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new and difficult to reach communities who are not currently represented.

2. Outcomes Required

- To recommend mechanisms, practice and evaluation that enables all local people and Community Groups to have a voice.
- To produce an outline and recommend the preparation of a Community Engagement Strategy.
- To recommend methods to manage the information collected as a result of the improvement in engagement, in order that it informs policy-making, service delivery and design.

3. Information Required

- An analysis of the Council's current method of engagement, including successes and failures of engaging with the community.
- A synopsis of all information currently available.
- Verbal evidence from employees, Borough and County Councillors.
- Written evidence from community organisations and groups.
- Best practice Councils.

4. Format of Information

- Officer reports/presentations
- Maps showing how areas are currently geographically split
- Baseline data
- Best practice external to Northampton
- Witness interviews/evidence
- Portfolio Holder evidence

5. Methods Used to Gather Information

- Minutes of the meetings

- Desktop research
- Examples of best practice
- Witness Interviews/evidence: -
    - Community and Councillor Co-Chairs of the Community Forums
    - Residents' Associations
    - Parish Councils
    - Chair of Northampton Tenants and Council Together (NTACT)
    - Mrs B Mennell, member of NTACT
    - Faith Leaders
    - Community Leaders
    - NBC and NCC Councillors
    - T Hall, Corporate Manager, NBC
    - L Ambrose, Area Partnerships and Forums Co-Ordinator, NBC
    - P Gadhia, NCC
    - J Tinker, Strategic Neighbourhood Manager, NCC

6. Co-Options to the Review Committee

None for this review. However all Task and Finish Groups should consider the provision of an external advisor.

7. Evidence gathering Timetable

July – September 2007

30 July	Scoping the review
13 and 23 August	Evidence gathering
4 September	Finalise Chair's report

8. Responsible Officers

Lead Officers   Simone Wade
Co-ordinator   Tracy Tiff

9. Resources and Budget

Simone Wade, Policy and Governance Manager, and Thomas Hall, Corporate Manager, to provide support and advice.

10 Final report presented by:

Completed by September 2007. Presented by the Chair of the Task and Finish Group to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 and then to Cabinet.

11 Monitoring procedure:

To review the impact of the report after six months (March 2008).

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Response from Chris Swinn. Vice Chair N-TACT
The Science of Citizenship:
"In making governance work, you have got to get the physics right – the structures – but you've also got to deal with the chemistry, the emotions involved.

The Community at large has been disempowered, disenfranchised and disengaged from the paramount and peak decision-making body the Full Council
Community Engagement is about involving the Citizens in decision-making.
First Things First - Change the Council Constitution back to what the Citizens had before September 2006. Allow Public to Address any Agenda Item at Full Council Meetings and return the Power to People to have their say, before it's too late.
Is this Modern 21st Century Participatory Democracy?

Q1) How well do you think the Council consults with you? Please give examples.

There has been inconsistency from consultation to consultation due to the obvious lack of strategy, protocols and rules of engagement.
I.e. The Ground Rules - The Do's and Don'ts

Good Consultations: 3 Stars
1) **Public Engagement and Communication Task & Finish Group (Simple the Best – Bench Mark**
2) **Budget Consultation 2004 / 2006**
3) **Vision 2035**
4) **Budget Consultation 2006 / 2007**

Fair Consultations: 2 Stars
1) **Budget Consultation 2005 / 2006**
2) **Neighbourhood Management Training, Workshop and information Sessions at the Guildhall and Community Forums and Area Partnerships**

Bad / Poor Consultations: 1 Star
1) **Housing Options Appraisal 2004 / 2005**
2) **Castle Ward CASPAR 3 + Neighbourhood Management 2005 to present day**
3) **Housing Strategy 2006 to 2011**
4) **BME Housing Strategy**

No Consultation: Nul Point / Zero Star
1) **Housing Allocation Policy Interim Changes**
2) **Neighbourhood Partnerships**

Q2) Do you think all Community Groups are adequately consulted? If not, please give details why.
No! Officers and Councillors need to get out about more and Listen, Learn, Talk to and Build Trust and Confidence with the Customers, the Citizens of our Great City
1) **Consultations tend to be Guildhall centred with same old familiar faces**
2) **We have four District Shopping Centres in Duston, Kingsthorpe, Mereway and Weston Flavell so use them**
3) **Community Centres and Community Rooms are under utilised, so use them.**
4) **Community Notice Boards Install them and then use them**
5) **Communicate – Communicate – Communicate Use the Media Press, Free Press, Radio and TV - All Publicity is good even when its bad – Promote Citizenry and the Council – Attract Citizens and Community Champions - Turn Weaknesses into Strengths and Threats into Opportunities**

Q3) How do you feel the Council's consultation mechanisms could be improved?

1) **Develop and Implement, the NBC Community Engagement, Citizens Participation, Communication and Consultation Strategy and Action Plan then Monitor and Review it Quarterly**

2) **Be Consistent, Open, Transparent and Honest at all Times**
3) **Councillors as Paramount Community Leaders need to hold regular rotating weekly Surgeries and Walkabouts with Residents.**
4) **Proactively Develop New Residents Associations, Tenants Groups and Community Groups.**
5) **Officers to facilitate, Councillors to lead and Citizens to participate**
6) **Always summarise plenary sessions, report back to meeting, and wash up meeting and then feedback outputs and outcomes to attendees, post to the NBC Website and issue a Press Release to all Media outlets**

Q4) Do you feel that the Neighbourhood Management and Neighbourhood Partnership process engages adequately with all Community Groups?
If not, please give details why.

1) **Neighbourhood Management Area (NMA) Boards**
   Certainly not! They appear to be officer dominated feudal fiefdoms of self appointed, selected and un-elected members of certain but not all Resident Associations that have no democratic mandate that meet in secret in closed meetings to which the residents at large are not invited.
   So much for Community Empowerment and Citizen Participation

   Solution: Directly Elect Resident Representatives every four years to represent suburbs or precincts in the Ward or NMA.
   Invite all residents at large in the NMA. Hold all monthly NMA meetings in Public
   See Bristol's 'Community at Heart' @ http://www.ndcbristol.co.uk/

2) **Neighbourhood Partnership (Forums)**
   Whilst they open to all citizens most do not know where and when they meet, so nobody turns up other than Officers and Councillors who always out number those they are suppose to be serving. Only attended by those in the Know, and the great and the good and informed.

Solution: Distribute Flyers to promote, attract and actually invite all local residents

Q5) In your opinion what Community Groups should the Council be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new communities not currently represented?

1) Hold a Community Engagement Summit at the Guildhall during Local Democracy Week - Invite the leaders of all Residents Associations, Community, National, Ethnic, Ecumenical, Religious and Faith Groups
2) Locate and Visit all the meetings of all Community Groups

Q6) Any additional information that you feel would inform the review.
Establish New Parish or Community Councils in every Ward incorporating the Neighbourhood Management Areas and Partnerships and all they deliver.

"Participation is the key to Community Harmony"

①

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP.

- How well do you think the Councils consults with you? Please give examples.

Not very well, I feel the council should consult more widly with Partners and other groups.

- Do you think all community groups are adequately consulted? If not, Please give details why.

No, because the don't feel they are being listened to or consulted to at times.

- How do you feel the Council's consultation mechanisms could be improved?

By consulting more widly disabled groups and disabled people and also all other borough council user groups.

- Do you feel that the Neighbourhood management and Neighbourhood Partnership process engages adequately with all groups? If not, Please give details why.

Not really, since the change I think they feel excluded and I also think they feel left out of the process, and they shouldnt. All people should be included and consulted if Possible.

- In your opinion what Community Groups should the Council be engaging with, in Particular how it should engage with new Communities not currently

③

represented?

Consulted groups not being consulted already should still Consult the ones they do. They

③.

represented?

Consulted groups not being
consulted already should still
consult the ones they do. They
should also consult new groups
so that nobody feels left out or
not consulted.

I would like to make the following input to the community engagement task and finish group.

The Council's current community engagement practices make it relatively easy for highly motivated and experienced people to engage with the council, but difficult for those who are less informed or less motivated. We have forums and area structures which play an important role, but with limited numbers of largely 'self selecting' people. This will always be a problem, but we should not allow it to lead us to move away from area partnertships and forums.

I sit on the Kingsthorpe/St. Davids/Boughton Green neighbourhood managed area as a Borough Councillor and I attend the Kingsley/Parklands area partnership as a County Councillor, although NCC has formally withdrawn. The two tier structure of neighbourhood engagement that we now have is causing problems. Area partnerships in the managed areas have ceased to exist, and their replacement is unclear. In the non-managed areas there is a feeling of resentment and uncertainty, coupled with anger at the lack of engagement of the County Council.

The Kingsley and Parklands area partnership consists of two wards that do not relate to each other at all well. We alternate the meetings between the two, the attendance generally reflects the venue for the particular meeting, but the way it operates fails to recognise that Parklands ward contains 3 very distinct communities (only one of which is represented by the very effective Parklands residents association). Kingsley is a number of overlapping and inter-related communities, with no single large residents association but a number of smaller groups representing streets and vocal individuals who play an important role in their street.

Neighbourhood managed areas have been chosen on the basis of pockets of deprivation and then expanded to create a critical mass population. I estimate the area of deprivation in St. Davids comprises less than 20% of that neighbourhood managed area, and a similar figure may apply in Eastfield/Headlands. So far, we have lost the level of engagement that we did have with residents in Kingsthorpe and Boughton Green, and we need to put that right quickly. We need to be able to move on with neighbourhood management, when we have got it right, to cover the whole town.

Residents associations vary widely in size and activity around the town, from focussing on one or two streets to a large estate. We need to consider how we enagage with people outside of residents associations and ensure that we have a geographical spread of representation at area meetings.

Could we consider a 'street warden' idea, in which we invite people to come forward as a volunteer warden for their street, to engage with the neighbourhood warden and community safety team and be invited to attend area partnerships. If we have two people come forward from a street, we invite them to be the nucleus of a residents group. These people are still self selecting, but they can provide us with the 'eyes and ears' we need and give then a role and status to motivate their continued involvement. It extends the idea of neighbourhood watch beyond policing to community engagement on a wider level and provides a line of communication back to all residents. The increased focus of activity neighbourhood management is creating in areas of deprivation can be used to promote the street warden idea, thus possibly increasing the participation of some hard to reach groups at the same time. The promotion of the idea will be seen as a positive step by NBC and our partners to improve our community engagement. They could be consultees on policy and budget proposals as well as on particular issues affecting their street, and they could be supported and encouraged to develop a network of contacts that may become a more formal residents association.

The idea needs more thought and planning, but the task and finish group might like to consider it. In many streets the individuals are already there, just not recognised and properly engaged. You may also be able to think of a better title than 'street warden' for the kind of volunteer role I am proposing.

Richard Church

Mrs D McKintosh   MBE
3 Sharrow Place
Ecton Brook
Northampton
NN3 5AJ

12th August 2007

Councillor Paul Varnsverry
Northampton Borough Council
The Guildhall
St Giles Square
Northampton NN1 1WG

Dear Cllr Varnsverry,

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP

I thank you for your letter and enclosures dated 6th August 2007
regarding the above. I am responding as former Chair of both
Ecton Brook Residents' Association, which is corrently dormant,
and of the Northampton Federation of Residents' Associations, of
which I remain an honorary life member.

In response to your core questions, I would make the following
comments:

1. As an individual, I find the Council consult fairly well on
major issues, e.g. proposed change of landlords in the Social
Housing Section.

2. I do not think that all Community groups are adequately
consulted, e.g. Community Groups do not receive planning
applications for their area as a matter of course on such vital
issues such as proposed housing developments, or change of use of
land. I realise planning applications can be viewed on request
but, unless one is aware of proposed changes, it can be too late
to make observations/objections on specific applications.

3. Consultation, in itself, is insufficient. Residents must
have feedback on their observations and feel that their voices
are being heard and considered. I have always been a strong
advocate for having a Residents' Liaison Officer, as was first
introduced by the former Northampton Development Corporation in
the late 1960s, and continued for a time by the Borough Council
after the winding-up of the NDC. This ensured a strong link
between the Residents' Groups and the Local Authority, thus
ensuring prompt and adequate answers to potential problems
identified and raised.
It is noted that local Councillors do attend Residents'
Association meetings, but the existence of a Liaison Officer
would give more ready access to officers and would allow more
mobility, with common problems in different areas being readily
identified.
In the case of Area Partnerships, for example, perhaps a
revolving venue could be considered, and also different times for
meetings to be held, to enable more representatives of the
community to attend and participate, and also the frequency of

such meetings could be considered to ensure continuity in work

being undertaken. I realise that Councillors might find this difficult, but a Residents' Liaison Officer would have this as a part of their job description.

4. From what I know of Neighbourhood Management and Neighbourhood Partnership, these work very well, with all kinds of groups, e.g. lo..cal authorities, police and resident groups, working together. It is always important to leave a working group in place after the project is concluded in order to maintain and sustain the work that has been carried out

5. I notice from the WITNESS INTERVIEWS/EVIDENCE , in the Methods Used to Gather Information listing that there is no inclusion of the NORTHAMPTON FEDERATION OF RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATIONS. This organisation has a very good working relationship with the Borough Council dating back to 1980. The Federations aim is to embrace all Community Groups within the borough, enabling them to be part of the decision making processes which affect their lives. Not all groups wish to be members of the Federation, but it is hoped that membership will be improved as it is proposed that in order to access funding a group must be a member of the Federation.

Due to the changes which have taken place within the Borough Council during the past twelve months, resident representation has failed to continue on various groups, e.g. Scrutiny Committees and Strategic Partnerships.

Resident representation is the essential key to making the residents of Northampton secure in the knowledge that their voice is being heard and listened to.

Yours sincerely,

Doreen McKintosh (Mrs)

Response to the Community Engagement Task and Finish Group's core questions

From Margaret Pritchard, Secretary, Northampton Federation of Residents' Association

1. Budget consultation but little else. Often short notice for feed back as most groups only meet once a month. Many RAs have newsletters which could include consultation questionnaires.

Many people feel happier talking to someone at their meeting rather than coming to a large public meeting at the Guildhall. Area Partnerships used to provide this facility, but NM too big & meetings are not open to the general public.

2. Northampton Federation of R A could be used better e.g. info sent out in advance then presentation & feedback given at a meeting.

3. NM has not been adequately explained to most groups, so people were not aware of the importance of sending Reps to the first meeting; This meant that only those who attended were able to join the board e.g. in Lumbertubs/ Thorplands only 2 RA are represented.

4. More should be done to enable new RA to start up e.g. an automatic grant for set up costs & help with constitution, training for officers of the group etc. This would require a development officer post to empower local people.

5. Ra's are hampered by lack of funds as applying for enabling grant is longwinded & time consuming. They should be regarded as the grass roots for consultation & engagement & should not have to spend a lot of time fundraising just to keep going.

These are my own views, having started Brookside Residents' Council nine years ago & being a member of NFRA.

Margaret.

Community engagement task and finish group
Written Evidence form Northampton Volunteering Centre

Northampton Volunteering Centre is the Local Infrastructure Organisation (LIO) providing support services to frontline voluntary and community groups. Part of this role is to provide advocacy on behalf of the sector and individual organisations and to provide a route for effective communication and consultation with the sector.

Northampton Volunteering Centre would like to submit the following evidence based on our work with voluntary and community groups. We have also consulted with the Steering Group of the Northampton Voluntary and Community Sector Forum. The Forum has a membership of 160 voluntary and community sector organisations and the Steering group is elected from this membership to direct the Forum's work. The Forum a provides a route for the local voluntary sector to have a voice, by feeding in to consultation and development plans and electing sector representatives. It is a communications and engagement channel between the voluntary and statutory sectors.

1   How well do you think the Council consults with you? Please give examples.

NBC doesn't consult with its constituencies well. Firstly people are not well informed, often relying on the local media for information, which is skewed or incorrect.

NBC has used the mechanism of the Northampton Voluntary and Community Sector Forum to consult with voluntary and community organisations however consultation has often been late and comes at the end of the process of policy formation rather than as a route to the actual formulation of policy. Therefore the ability of voluntary and community organisations to input is limited. The Forum's involvement in consultation also relies on a pro-active approach by the worker who supports the Forum both to identify consultations, which the Borough is undertaking and to press for the voluntary sector to be included as consultees.

The national Compact between the voluntary and public sectors has a code of practice relating to consultation and policy appraisal (see www.compact.org.uk publications, a copy is attached). This state that there should be a minimum 12 week period for written consultations as well as providing a lot of other guidance about how to approach consultation. NBC does not always follow the Compact. There have been short notice consultations, both written and where consultations events have been held, for example the annual budget consultations. This makes it extremely difficult to get the information to possible consultees effectively and much less likely that people can participate. The short time frames have at times seemed to be indicative of a lack of a proper planned approach to consultation. NBC lacks a consultation strategy to ensure timely and effective consultation

instead consultation seems to be run on an ad hoc basis, which can lead to duplication and ineffective methods.

The voluntary sector does not feel that there will be any action as a result of it input to consultation. Eg the ongoing consultation about funding for voluntary and community groups which has been taking place for 2/3 years

NBC Forums
These appear to exist in something of a vacuum. Those attending bring no mandate in most cases and therefore represent a collection of individual views. This is in itself not wrong, but does not seem the most effective way of consulting either on the basis of cost or of reach.

2   Do you think all Community Groups are adequately consulted? If not, please give details why?

Clearly all community groups are not consulted adequately. There does not appear to be any process for maintaining contact with existing groups or tracking the development of new groups.

As the Local Infrastructure Organisation for Northampton, NVC has contact with many community groups especially new and emerging groups and many are members of the Northampton Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Forum, which is co-ordinated through NVC and provides a voice for the VCS and a mechanism for consultation and elected representation. However, during a mapping exercise of community groups in Northampton in the late summer of 2006, NVC discovered new groups, proving that a proactive approach is necessary in engaging with such groups.

NBC need s to adopt a range of different consultation and engagement methods to reach members of the community and allow longer for consultation. NBC should utilise existing pathways such as the Northampton Voluntary and Community Sector Forum and fully recognise that the voluntary sector can be a route to reaching communities even if their work covers a larger geographic area because they do grass routes work. Further investment in the Forum could facilitate the development of its reach into community groups.

There has been no dedicated long-term resource applied to support the development or capacity of residents associations and these are therefore patchy and inconsistent in their ability to engage. They are also often not representative of the residents of their local area. NVC as the Northampton infrastructure organisation could provide more in depth support if we had further funding.

There are communities of geography and there are community of interest.

There is a difference between consultation directly with residents and consultation with community groups.

3 How do you feel the Council's consultation mechanisms could be improved?

- It could be more effective/efficient to use existing mechanisms, rather than duplicate. NBC should commission consultation through other VCS organisations, which have a close association with particular groups of people or organisations, such as disabled people. These organisations are much more in tune with their members or users and understand the best ways to elicit their views.

- If consulting with community groups then the voluntary sector's own mechanism – the Northampton Voluntary and community Sector Forum could be commissioned to undertake this role more effectively.

- Fully adopt the Compact Code on Consultation and Policy Appraisal including the minimum timescales for consultation and commitment to making consultation a meaningful process

- There must be a more planned approach – a calendar of consultations should be set up linked to key points in the council year eg budget setting

- Plan and consult early – not after all the ideas have been formulated

- Clarity of roles – which NBC officers are involved in consultation and engagement and who does what

- NBC needs to develop its skills in running consultations so that the best methods are employed. For example some consultation questions have clearly not been written by someone with a research background – this will impact on the quality of the data gathered and probably also on the likelihood of response.

- Be flexible and sensitive to the needs of those you wish to consult – think about how to reach all of the intended target audience, and take account positively of the specific needs and interests

- NBC should think about the future of the Council Forums – are these the most inclusive and cost effective approach, could they be reformatted creating a broader equalities forum and what external interest groupings coming together in another context could be utilised instead.

- Explain where decisions have already been made – make clear what you can change and what you can't.

- Provide feedback on the outcomes of consultation and commit to actually taking on board what people say and making at least some changes as a result

- NBC needs to think about ongoing engagement as well as consultation. There should be ongoing dialogue. Ongoing dialogue can help improve the development and delivery of programmes based on partnership, where improved mutual understanding can enhance joint working and policy outcomes. One route for this is through the Voluntary and Community Sector Forum but other routes should be created in communities so that issues can be raised and the information retained an utilised and discussions about solutions can be more ongoing

4.   Do you feel that the Neighbourhood Management and Neighbourhood Partnership process engages adequately with all Groups? If not, please give details why.

It will be difficult to generate engagement at this micro neighbourhood level and this will rely on community development activity to help stimulate involvement.

The area partnerships suffered in effectiveness when the county council withdrew from them meaning the residents concerns about issue of relevance to them could not be answered when related to NCC services.

There should be greater links between the Neighbourhood approach and the wider voluntary and community sector as there is a danger that the Neighbourhood approach will be run very separately. For example Neighbourhood managers and co-ordinators have different experience but need to receive an induction about the Northampton vcs and to promote l linked up approach to taking the issues experienced by communities and their needs.

5.   In your opinion what Community Groups should the Council be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new communities not currently represented?

NBC should use VCS pathways as a route in and commission additional pieces of work rather than attempting to be aware of all voluntary and community groups itself.

NBC should think about its methods for reaching communities of interest and communities of geography.

NVC can provide a link to small and emerging groups as part of our role is to help people thinking of starting a new voluntary/community group.

Use established vcs organisations and their links with the localities and communities of interest

6.   Any additional information that you feel would inform the review

Consultation should be a strategic mechanism not a reactive mechanism. There should be ongoing information gathering.

In the VCS service user involvement happens all the time and therefore service users feel value and make a contribution to their own futures.

Consultation and community engagement is also linked to representation for example representation on the LSP. There is no longer a clear route for vcs involvement in the LSP.

PARKLANDS RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

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14TH AUGUST 2007

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TASK & FINISH GROUP

DEAR TRACY,

TO TRY AND ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS

QU.1. I DO NOT THINK THE COUNCIL CONSULTS WITH US AS A GROUP VERY WELL. ALOT OF TIMES WE HEAR OR READ IN THE PAPER WHAT IS GOING ON. IT IS VERY RARE THAT WE HAVE ANY CORRESPONDENCE TO OUR RESIDENTS ASS.

QU.2. I CANNOT SPEAK FOR OTHER GROUPS BUT I DO NOT THINK THAT WE AS A GROUP ARE NOT ADEQUATLEY CONSULTED.

QU.3 NOTIFY ALL GROUPS THAT ARE REGISTERED WITH THE COUNCIL

QU.4. NEIGHBOURHOOD PARTNERSHIPS IN MY OWN OPINION DO NOT WORK. IN THE YEARS I HAVE BEEN ATTENDING THE MEETINGS WE SEEM TO GO OVER THE SAME GROUND AND VERY LITTLE IS ACHEIVED. AT THE PRESENT MOMENT IT HAS BEEN DECIDED THAT THE MEETINGS ARE ATTENDED BY ALL AGENCIES INCLUDING THE COUNTY COUNCIL BUT THEY VERY RARELY APPEAR. I THINK IT IS A MECHANISM TO LET PEOPLE AIR THEIR VIEWS BUT NOTHING SEEMS TO GET DONE.

QU.5 AS I SAID EARLIER NOTIFY REGISTERED GROUPS. ANY NEW COMMUNITY SHOULD BE APPROACHED AND THEN THEY WOULD HAVE TO DECIDE IF THE WANT TO BE REPRESENTED.

QU.6 OVER THE YEARS I HAVE BEEN INVOLVED WITH THE COUNCIL I HAVE FOUND THAT THE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE COUNCIL AND MYSELF IS VERY POOR, IF YOU CAN GET THROUGH BY TELEPHONE YOU GET A VOICEMAIL MESSAGE AND MORE OFTEN THAN NOT YOU DO NOT GET A REPLY. ANOTHER EXPERIENCE IS:- IF THE PERSON YOU ARE DEALING WITH IS SICK OR ON LEAVE THERE ISN'T ANYONE TO TAKE A DECISION ETC. (VERY FRUSTRATING). THANK YOU

B Cooper
BRIAN COOPER

Overview & Scrutiny Community Engagement Task & Finish Group.

Tracy,

With regard to the information you sent out I have collected together the thoughts of some of the councillors from Billing Parish Council and I reproduce them below for your information.

I recently attended a full Borough Council meeting, as an observer, to listen to the debate regarding Little Billing Village Green. The motion to adopt 'Village Green' status was defeated and the leader of the council, Cllr Woods stated several times that there was a need to consult with Billing Parish Council. After a week of no contact with either the clerk or myself I emailed Cllr Woods direct. I received a reply approximately 12 days later, maybe coincidently at the point where the local press had become interested. I replied to Cllr Woods email and again over a week passes by with no response, not even an acknowledgement. (Steve Rockall, Chairman).

I regularly attend relevant Area Partnership Meetings and CASPAR Meetings, which usually have a selection of local Councillors, and quite often Council employees in attendance. These are good forums, and enable members of the public to express their concerns with local issues, such as security, environmental concerns, unruly behaviour etcetera. I feel that these meetings are not publicised sufficiently, and more members of the general public should be notified of the existence of these meetings, and encouraged to attend. Perhaps details could be included with Council Tax demands?

The Councils record on consultation at most levels is at least poor. What the Council may believe they are doing and what the public's perception is of many consultations are often widely at variance. Partly due to the poor record of Government and Councils both in the consultation process and the response, the general public are often reluctant to engage in the consultation. Witness the public's poor level of response to consultations and the turn out at local elections when they consider they are not being heard or listened to. Also, depending on the subject matter, many of the respondents are from "extremist" groups and the outcome can be skewed by their views.

At more local level, when was the last time a council asked the residents of an area about cleanliness, maintenance of footpaths and roadways, waste disposal, recycling, certain developments and changes proposed to an area and other matters that ordinary people have views on but fail to be heard or listened to by their council executive and/or elected councillors.

Specific example: something that has reach the national newspapers recently, tree felling and pollarding in towns and cities. Residents are not at all pleased to see trees cut down at the whim of the local authority with no consultation and in many cases where there has been no attempt at remedial action to make trees safe or tend to disease. Northampton Borough and County Councils are both guilty.

Groups specially singled-out for communication should include Parish Councils, Residents' Associations, and Neighbourhood Watch Groups, as members of such organisations are in touch with any problems occurring in their communities, and also keep abreast of local opinion. Perhaps more help could be given to new communities

to form Residents' Associations, as these are usually excellent forums for local views and   concerns.

As far as the Council itself is concerned, it has to be said that although there are many knowledgeable and efficient employees in this vast organisation, there is also a lot of dross. If you were directed to the right people and the right departments when making telephone enquiries it would be very helpful, as would an acknowledgement of correspondence let alone a reply which, in my experience, is about as likely as the development of hens' teeth. Higher standards of staff selection and training would clearly be the answer here.

Quite often groups are only consulted when it suits the case or when there is an outcry regarding a particularly sensitive issue. There needs to be standards and processes in place to allow the community to be consulted on many more matters that affect the general and tax paying public with more openness and accountability not just for Councillors but also for the Executive. Many residents of Northampton are not happy with the money spent on failed senior appointments to the council's executive.

I work for the County Council and I see it from the inside. They want to go into Call centres rather than have specific departments deal with enquiries. Most other organisations like insurance companies, banks and building societies etc. have already abandoned this idea but the County Council wants to introduce it. It will mean more incorrect and inaccurate information being given out to the public. Staff numbers have to be reduced considerably already and they are losing older experienced staff.

If the councils do consult, extremist bodies do invariably skew the results. If anyone tries to engage the local council's often you are bounced around the depts. as no one seems to knew who/which department is responsible. Remember how the Borough & County could not state who are responsible for various footpaths etc etc.

(Response to the third point raised) Simply by actually having the processes in place along with the courage and conviction to actually do it many cases. Why should the electorate not be encouraged to engage in their communities?

(And to the fourth point) There would appear to be an attempt to engage with interested parties but often the organisations that need to engage are often less than enthusiastic about the consultation. An example is the local Police force, who we accept are busy people, but can't always attend gatherings, often at short notice, because of other commitments. This can be perceived as lack of interest or a low priority but seen as much higher priority to local communities. Also, more specific to Councils, are the responses of some departments. When asked to engage in consultation it is often seen as something of an inconvenience and they lack the skills or enthusiasm to handle such events. If the council's arboreal specialists

were asked to discuss their work with a local community group, would they really know how to handle the situation?

Hope this is of some use.

Steve Rockall
Chairman

were asked to discuss their work with a local community group, would they really know how to handle the situation?

Appendix B

Overview and Scrutiny

Community Engagement Task and Finish Group

23 August 2007

Response to the Group's core questions from County Councillor Alan Hills

My response to the questions are as follows !

1-The Council does consult with community groups, particularly in the neighbourhood renewal role. Overall a more hands on approach is needed at grass roots level.

2-Some very minor groups feel left out and therefore do not respond.

3-The mechanism could be improved by direct contact and visits to their organisation, events and meetings etc, then regular contact must be maintained, they have to feel that their needs and views are valued.

4-See all above comments.

5-It is essential council should be engaging with all community groups, particularly Residents and Tenants Associations also refer to comments in item 3.

Alan Hills

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Response from Councillor Jean Hawkins

- How well do you think the Council consults and engages with Community Groups? Please give examples.
- **In my experience in Eastfield ward consultation appears to be a token activity**
- **The problem would be in having a full and representative contact list e.g. a very limited number of people attended the area partnership open meetings – how was information about these disseminated? Was there full use of all media   e.g. how can the Council assume that the people chosen as contacts do in fact report back to the wider community Residents Associations similarly involve a small sample of the eard – typical mm attendance at both Eastfield RA and Lakeview RA would be 20   - 30 or 40 might attend if there is an issue**
- **Summary   I accept that the Council has attempted a fair consultation process e.g. for the Budget setting but this has reached only a very small proportion of residents**
- Do you think all Community Groups are adequately consulted? If not, please give details why. **NO In Eastfield ward there a number of active groups, small in number and changing in composition e.g. Eastfield outreach this group is seen by others as outside the established mainstream but its members have valid concerns and make a positive contribution to the community AND WANT TO HAVE A VOICE**
- How do you feel the Council's consultation mechanisms could be improved? **Major publicity drive re consultation all stops pulled out e.g. like advertising for the Balloon festival**
- Do you feel that the Neighbourhood Management and Neighbourhood Partnership process engages adequately with all Community Groups? If not, please give details why. **This scheme is in embryo it is untried and untested yet because of its newness BUT I see a major problem in lack of common model between the different NMs   In Eastfield it was thought that the sheer number of members on committees would make meetings unwieldy   this decision clearly impedes full democratic involvement**
- **Once open consultation meetings are held in Eastfield there will be a fuller opportunity – but this will depend**

on constituent groups being informed e.g. churches small local clubs (allotment group type I have in mind)

- In your opinion what Community Groups should the Council be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new communities not currently represented? **This repeats a question above   all groups and individuals should be invited to participate some will attend meetings others may use a web site others prefer questionnaires Libraries GP surgeries stall in main shopping malls   stalls at any/al major NBC events for consultation/feed back   see Milton Keynes for how to do this shopping centre has excellent information and contact stall**
- Any additional information that you feel would inform the review.

II have had some close involvement with the set up of the Eastfield NM-would be willing to give verbal evidence about issues facing public consultation but think Brian Markham as Chair may have given a thorough report already

Response to the Community Engagement Task and Finish Group's Core Questions

From

Glynis Bliss
County Director
Victim Support Northamptonshire

Further to the letter of 6 August, received today, here is my feedback as requested (if I don't do these things straight away I discover them 3 months later!):

Q: Would a pack signposting to other funding steams be useful:

Response:
Any information about other and additional forms of funding is useful, but by the time the funding process has taken place and decisions made, it is often too late to apply elsewhere, both in terms of accessing funding streams and also re budget setting and determining the future of affected posts.

What would be helpful is constructive information about how the decision was made not to fund - what criteria the applicant didn't reach, feedback about the construction and content of the application.

Q: Is the current process of distributing funding fair and equitable contributing to the Council's priorities:

Response:
Compared with other funding processes it does seem to be fair, however, some other processes use scoring systems that are easily understood and feedback can be given easily about where applications didn't meet the criteria or scored less highly than others.
We haven't always had good (or any real) feedback about decisions; sometimes several versions about decisions have been given. I'm not sure how open to the public/applicants the committee meetings are or how well advertised, but it would be helpful and constructive to have open meetings where officers present their recommendations and decisions are made. This would give real transparency.

Q: Suggest ways in which the Council can support the voluntary sector infrastructure:
Q: How could the Council support organisations awarded grants, including monitoring and evaluation:
Q: Any other information:

Response:
I am aware of the support given through NCompass, but I don't get much information about how NCompass is working or about developments. Probably there is a newsletter of sorts, but I don't get it, whereas I used to get a lot of info from the CVS.

The council could give practical support such as opening up its own training more at reduced cost, particularly in relation to management, which the volry sector often struggles to resource. Also offer access to its own basic IT/H&S/etc training at free or reduced cost and offer access to reduced cost hardware such as IT if the Council has bulk contracts.

It might be helpful, for the Council to nominate individual Councillors to 'sponsor' a voluntary group, whether funded or not, so as to ensure a spread of knowledge about the voluntary sector and individual issues and successes.   This would need commitment from Councillors as, where it happens in other areas, often the Councillor contact/attendance either doesn't happen or drops off.

The bidding process for LAA/CDRP funding should become more open and transparent so that it is not seen as a restricted pot for the usual few statutory agencies.

in response to your questionnaire on Community Engagement:

1. The council consults the Partnership on matters relating to Community Safety and Crime with the context of the Partnership itself. The council one of the three Lead partners , with the County and the Police. The partnership has itself limited direct engagement with its communities.

2. In the area of Community Safety , the Council struggles to reach Hard to reach groups and new emerging communities. We have little evidence of engagement with these communities and little collection of data that enables the 'real picture' to be obtained. Attempts at regular contact with community groups should be evidenced. Groups consulted should include the 'geographic' as well as the 'special interest'. Since the review of Area Partnerships, many of which has been disbanded and the replacement process not yet finalised, there does not seem to be a regular process by which local communities can voice there concerns to the council.

3. As mentioned following the review of area partnerships, we are no longer fully aware of the mechanism used. However, local groups are likely to complain about time and location of meetings, doubt as to whether they are really listened to and belief in the fact they they are consulted as a matter of tokenism.Importantly community groups want to see action as a result of engagement and feedback that evidences that fact. Therefore anything that picks up these frustrations will be likely to improve the situation.

4. While consultation has been undertaken in the Neighbourhood management priority areas to determine those communities priorities, it is still in its infancy and a robust two way engagement provcess is still to be finalised. It has also suffered from lack of continuity with managers to take this issue forward . To work , the community will need to get to know and trust their local neighbourhood manager, and they need to be empowered to influence decision making at the local level . They should also be trusted with a 'small' budget to apply to their own priorities.The local area will need a community management group empowered to do the above. Engagement is not being involved in the discussion ,its being involved in the decision.

5.If encouraged , 'new communities' will engage. They often do via Legal Rights forums, Refugee forums and the like. The council should establish where they do engage, then go to them.not always expect them to come to us.

6.We are aware other authorities are struggling with these issues, therefore the authority should not try to reinvent the wheel but look for some innovative best practice.

We would be happy to discuss this further.

Tony Hurrell
Bill Edwards

I am responding from my home email having given some thought to the request, and as I understand the deadline is Monday noon, and I have a meeting before noon that will prevent me replying on my work email.

The issue that seems to me to have the highest priority is to provide the community with a mechanism for addressing shortfalls where the County Council or the Police are the responsible party. This might have to be achieved through a scrutiny committee, which can synthesise public concerns into resolutions that Northants County Council and the Police be asked to address, and be seen to be asked to address, and be recorded as failing to address.

The transfer of so many powers such as transport, streets, pavements, highway maintenance to NCC, and their outsourcing of these roles to contractors such as Atkins Global, has massively disenfranchised the people of Northampton. Street Doctor is a conspicuous failure. NCC officials disregard concerns about things that are contracted out. Contractors are under no real obligation to respond to public concerns, especially as they are not being held to contract by NCC. The police also appear to be disregarding local issues, and the new local level initiatives are hardly visible. There is a growing public frustration.

That frustration is not aimed at NCC or the police but at NBC. For one thing people do not fully understand that powers affecting their wellbeing inside the town are being run by the county council. Many aspects of civic services that people always took for granted as being responsibilities of the town, are now being handled by remote outsiders who do not seem to respect the electorate.

It is in NBC's interests as well as the Northampton community, for NBC to provide a mechanism for representing public frustration to NCC and the police, and demonstrating that this has not been complied with. That will strengthen NBC and appease a lot of public concern.

At the same time more scrutiny of the response of internal officers is needed. I have had a succession of email exchanges with one NBC official recently who is being deliberately obtuse. He answers marginals to my questions and ignores the rest. Piecemeal he is gradually answering my points, but I do get the feeling he thinks himself cleverer than the ratepayers. Now this might be just my perception of one member of NBC staff, and he might be as nice as pie normally, but if I am not the only person encountering obtuse behaviour, a scrutiny panel is needed to try to resolve such impasses.

Regarding the new groups that replace Neighbourhood Committees, the Neighbourhood Managed Areas, could NBC do something to ensure that NCC sends representation, and also that the police send effective representations. My own experience is that NCC's continual absence greatly limits what can be done, for the aforementioned reasons, and NBC needs to be bold and flag up to Central Government the fact that NCC is not engaging in community consultation. The police keep sending rookies to these sessions for training purposes, who have no idea what was discussed at previous meetings, and are unable to contribute without going back for orders, where their similarly uninformed substitutes next meeting are equally unable to inform. Again I feel it is NBC's responsibility to flag up pathetic police support, and be seen to uphold democracy, and not be passive to NCC and the police's bad behaviour.

The same applies to higher-level consultations such as Town Centre Commission Steering Group, where NCCs pathetic presence holds everything back. NBC needs to be seen as proactive not passive.

Another area I feel could be addressed is to carry forward key issues raised in Forums and Community Groups into the public domain, using questionnaires on-line and at information pick up points, where a wider population can be consulted than participates through forums etc. These could be issues where the forums or other groups are limited in scope by the numbers of participants are few, where throwing the question open might generate a clearer message and better information about solutions.

One of the problems facing forum participants is the means of representing issues into specialist committees. I know the public can observe many committees but cabinet and portfolios put an end to a lot of important community involvement in decision-making. I particularly regret the loss of the Health Committee. At present co-chairs and forum members have to canvass the portfolio holder to take up issues on their behalf, and the process is largely invisible. Increased transparency and participation is needed.

Witness Core Questions

- How well do you think the Council consults with you? Please give examples.
- Do you think all Community Groups are adequately consulted? If not, please give details why.
- How do you feel the Council's consultation mechanisms could be improved?
- Do you feel that the Neighbourhood Management and Neighbourhood Partnership process engages adequately with all Community Groups? If not, please give details why.
- In your opinion what Community Groups should the Council be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new communities not currently represented?
- Any additional information that you feel would inform the review.

Glossary of Terms

Detailed below are some of the terms used by Northampton Borough Council, which explain how the Council uses or interprets a term, phrase or abbreviation.

Annual Report	Scrutiny Committees summarise their work and findings in an annual report.
Audit Commission	The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is used economically, efficiently and effectively. It regulates the proper control of public finances by local authorities and the National Health Service, and is responsible for conducting inspections relating to Best Value Reviews and to the Comprehensive Performance Assessment of local councils.
Allowance	A payment towards expenses or costs.
Members' Allowances	Paid to Members in recognition of out of pocket expenses or direct costs of being a Member of the Council
Best Value	Relates to the Local Government Act, 1999 - the means by which the Council seeks to deliver high quality services in an efficient and cost effective way
BVPP	Best Value Performance Plan
Backbencher	A term applied to Members who are not part of the Cabinet

Budget	The annual summary of income and Expenditure
By-Election	An election which occurs between main (4 yearly) elections
Cabinet (Executive)	The Cabinet body of elected Councillors responsible for day-to-day running of the Council and the development of policy. Cabinet Members have portfolios or areas of responsibility (e.g. Housing) for which they take cabinet decisions.
Call-in	The process by which Overview and Scrutiny Committees can look at whether a decision is properly taken or is the right decision and require it to be considered.
Casting vote	A second vote made by the chair of the meeting to decide a matter when there is a tied vote
Chair/Deputy Chair	The person who chairs a Committee of the Council e.g. a Scrutiny Committee.
Chief Executive	The most senior paid official of the Council with overall responsibility for the whole of the Council's operation
Coalition	An alliance of groups or parties

Code of Practice/Code of Conduct	A set of rules, usually of expected behaviour
Census	Since 1801, every 10 years the nation has set aside one day for the Census - a count of all people and households. It is the most complete source of information about the population that we have. The latest Census was held on Sunday 29 April 2001.
Community Strategy	Under the Local Government Act 2000, all Councils are required to work in partnership with the community as well as private, voluntary and public sector partners to develop a long-term strategy to promote the social, economic and environmental well-being of their local communities.
Co-Opted Member to a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group	An individual with an area of expertise or experience who is invited to sit on a Committee or Work Group (either for the Municipal year or for the duration of a specific review) to provide information and advice to maximise effective decision-making.
Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)	A performance management framework for Councils to draw together all the assessments made by the inspectorates, external Audit and Government departments. Councils are rated in one of five categories (excellent, good, fair, weak, poor). One of the main outcomes of the assessment will be an action plan for

	improvement and a programme of work for the subsequent year.
Constitution	The set of rules governing the decision-making arrangements and activities of Northampton Borough Council.
Council	The term used for the organisation or in respect of the meeting of all of the Councillors
Councillor (or Member)	An elected local representative on the Council, a Councillor represents the interests of the people who live in their ward and Northampton as a whole.
Council Tax	The money raised by the Council from residents of the Borough
Cross-cutting review	A cross-cutting review addresses a topic which covers more than one service area, and in certain cases, examines services provided by organisations other than the Council (e.g. the police, health trusts, voluntary sector organisations, etc). One of the aims of such a review is to ascertain how well the various agencies communicate and work together, and to put forward recommendations for

	improvements in this area.
Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)	The central Government Department with primary responsibility for Local Government matters.
Directors	The most senior paid officials, after the Chief Executive, each having responsibility for wide areas of the Council's operations
Elected Mayor	An individual elected directly by the electorate (not councillors) to run the Council [Not a system adopted in Northampton].
Employee	A paid official of the Council sometimes referred to as an Officer.
Executive	See Cabinet.
Exempt information	Information which is exempt from the normal publication rules (normally under Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act, 1972)
Forward Plan	A list of key decisions which will be taken by the Cabinet. The plan is updated each month.
Head of Paid Service	A statutory role, usually combined with that of Chief Executive
Home Office	The Government department responsible for internal affairs in England and Wales, e.g. public order,

	public safety, immigration, etc.
Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)	The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) was established by and for Local Government in April 1999. It aims to: - - deliver practical solutions to improve local government performance - develop innovative approaches to ensure the transfer of knowledge within local government - act on behalf of local government as a whole, promoting joined-up, locally delivered services
Independent Member	Either a Councillor who is not a member of a recognised political party also, or in the context of the Standards Committee, a member who is neither a Borough Councillor or a Parish Council representative.
Key Decision	An important decision which affects more than one ward of the Council or will involve spending of large amounts of money. They must be made public and can only be taken after appropriate notice

Leader of the Council	The political head of the Council, usually the leader of the largest group of Members (or coalition) - responsible for the proposal of policies and day to day running of the Council.
Local Government Association (LGA)	The LGA represents the local authorities of England and Wales – a total of just under 500 authorities. There are 34 county councils, 36 metropolitan borough councils, 47 English unitary authorities, 33 London authorities, 238 shire district councils and 22 Welsh unitary authorities. The LGA also represents police authorities, through the Association of Police Authorities (APA); fire authorities and passenger transport authorities.
Local Government Information Unit (LGIU)	The LGIU is an independent research and information organisation supported by over 150 councils and the local government trade unions. The LGIU aims to be an advocate for strong democratic local government with the financial base and powers required to act with and on behalf of local communities.
Local Government Ombudsman	The nationally appointed person (department) which looks into complaints by the public about the way they have been treated by or the

	service they have received from councils
Manager	An employee who is responsible for managing employees, resources and services
Member (Councillor)	A Councillor; the elected representative of the community
Member of the Public	Anyone who is not a part of the Council
Minutes	The formal record of the proceedings of a meeting
Monitoring Officer	The officer appointed under the Local Government and Housing Act, 1989 to oversee the legality of the Councils actions and the ethical behaviour of Members and employees
Northampton Borough Council (NBC)	The local authority, which delivers borough council services to the whole of Northampton. These are mostly different to the services provided by Northamptonshire County Council.

Officer	A paid official of the Council
Overview and Scrutiny	The process offers both opportunities and challenges for Councillors and members of the public to improve the quality and delivery of services the Council provides to its local communities. The work of overview and scrutiny includes:- - Policy Development and Review - Oversight of the Best Value Review Programme - Holding the cabinet to account
PI	Performance Indicator
Policy	A plan of action or approach to an issue - part of the Council's Policy Framework
Policy and Financial Framework	The Council's main policies and approach to managing its finances
Political Proportionality/Balance	The system by which each group is represented on Council bodies in proportion to the number of members of the particular group relative to the size of the council as a whole
Portfolio Holder	A Member of the Cabinet with responsibilities for specific aspects of the Council's policy or work

Protocol	A document, which sets out, how people will behave or matters will be handled.
Referendum	A ballot of all electors of the Borough - in particular on whether they wish to have an elected mayor
Regulatory	The functions of the Council which "regulate" e.g. licensing and planning.
Rules of Procedure	The rules that govern the way specified matters must be handled. (previously known as Standing Orders)
Scrutiny	(See Overview and Scrutiny). The way in which Members oversee the work of the Council and investigate the needs of the community
Scrutiny Review	A study led by Scrutiny Councillors on a current issue, selected by the Committee. It aims to identify areas of good as well as poor practice, compare performance with other councils' countrywide, and challenge existing practice where relevant.

The review will lead to recommendations for improvements to relevant Cabinet Members as well as outside agencies, such as health trusts. While these are not obliged to support |

	the recommendations, effective consultation has been proven to lead to consensus and to Cabinet support for reviews undertaken.
Standards Board	The national body which oversees ethical standards of behaviour
S151 Officer	The finance officer employed under s151 of the Local Government Act, 1972 - who is responsible for the financial probity and arrangements of the Council
Ward	An area of Northampton for which elections are conducted
Work Programme	The Work Programme sets out the work of the Committee for the 12-month period, although it may go beyond this.

Council Speak Bingo Card

Forum	L.S.P.	Portfolio Holder	Sit on...
Mayor	CYPP	Ward	Chair
Working Party	L.A.A.	Consultation	Whip
Council	U.K.Y.P.	Scrutiny	Pass a motion
Minutes	SCT	Cabinet	Apologise

consulting people

Appendix F

customers | stakeholders | citizens

Portsmouth
CITY COUNCIL

START

consulting people

PROCESS
APPROVED
FOR BEST VALUE

the toolkit

intro | consulting people

Welcome to the toolkit. It will help us to consult and involve people in what we do. It's designed so that you can 'plug in' your service or issue at the beginning and it will lead you through what you will need to do. It contains simple tools to enable you to consult effectively. **It's the agreed Portsmouth City Council approach.**

When consulting on your service or any other issue you will probably need to focus on finding out about the needs, concerns, priorities and satisfaction levels of your current and potential service users and other stakeholders.

Everyone's different.
Everyone has a unique set of needs and views.

It's your job to understand and respond to them. This toolkit will help you to put customers at the heart of everything we do.

call 023 9283 4050
if you need any help or
email consult@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

The need to consult people on what we do for them is hotting up.

Because:

- Our organisation has chosen, through it's core policies and general approach to be customer focused.
- Local people are less likely to accept poor quality services or decisions they disagree with. (79% want us to make more effort to find out their views).
- Councils must act on the results of consultation. It's the law.

Legislation makes it our duty to consult our local people on all aspects of our services. Quite a challenge. More than that, we must be able to demonstrate that we have acted on what we have found out and that we've improved our services as a result.

These four stages are the agreed framework for consultation at PCC. This booklet will give you tools to work through the key stages.

listening to customers

stage one:
decide WHO to consult with

stage two:
decide WHAT to consult on

stage three:
decide HOW to ask them

stage four:
START the consultation

stage one | deciding who to consult

Everyone involved in your service has a view on how it could be improved. Non users, staff, councillors, suppliers, local people, agencies and organisations as well as your key customers will all be full of ideas on how to improve the service.

You will need to work out **who** your stakeholders are and plan to consult them all. **You should start with the main customers/users of your service.** For example if you were to consult on making improvements to a local park, you would probably need to consult with park users, people who live nearby, the rangers, local agencies or groups, businesses, the contractor and people who don't use the park (to find out why not).

You can start here by thinking which service, issue or challenge you want to consult on. Try to think in terms of smallest service unit that's appropriate eg. Pest Control not Environmental Health.

Tools 1 and 2 that follow on the next page should help you to map out who your stakeholders are. The first is a checklist to give you some ideas of who your consultees should be and the second is a reminder to make special efforts to listen to certain types of people who are sometimes harder to reach.

Remember:

- Use a phased approach - who will you listen to first?
- Pilot things and learn and improve as you go
- Keep a record of who you are going to consult and why (eg for Equality Impact assessments)

You cannot consult with absolutely everyone about absolutely everything. Do whatever you feel an objective observer would think reasonable and appropriate

tool 1 | use this checklist to draw a simple map of your stakeholders

Key Customers

- People who pay directly.
- People who pay indirectly (eg through council tax).
- Users of 'collective' services (eg roads, street lights).
- Internal customers (eg other staff).

think 360º

Non-Users

- People who are unaware of the service.
- Dissatisfied ex-customers.
- People who might need the service at a later date.

Others

- People we enforce against or who are regulated (eg landlords).
- Citizens/local people.
- Businesses.
- Interested agencies - voluntary, private, public sector.
- People affected by policies or development (eg planning).
- Local Councillors, Neighbourhood Forum, MP's carers/advocates/community boards etc.

5

tool 2 | consulting with the
'Hard to Reach' checklist
Appendix F

For lots of reasons, you will need to make particular arrangements to find out some people's views.

For example:

- People who have problems reading, writing and speaking English.
- Some people on low incomes.
- Some people from ethnic minorities.
- Some people who are generally 'too busy'.
- Older people.
- Young people.
- People who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- People who are blind or partially sighted.
- People who have mobility difficulties.

You will need to find innovative ways of consulting with these people. Specialist advice on how to do this is available from the Equalities Unit on 023 9284 1450.

involving evaluating
action methods

stage two | deciding what to consult on

Once you have identified the people you need to consult with, you can start thinking about what questions to ask. There are a few key points:

- Don't just ask about things that **you** think are appropriate - think from the customer's point of view. What do they want to tell you about?

- Think clearly about your **objectives** for consulting people - why are you doing it? What decisions will it influence?

- Best Value means we have to **challenge** the way the service is now and question if the need could be met more effectively. Use consultation to explore this key issue.

Avoid asking about things that are just interesting to know - focus on issues that you can change or strongly influence.

Thinking about the points above should lead you to some ideas about what questions to ask.

Once you have done that use tools 3 and 4 that follow to draft some question areas. You can turn them into finished questions later.

Keep a record of why you chose these questions.

Phone 023 9283 4050 if you need any help.

tool 3 | think about
your objectives for consulting

Which of these do you want to do?

- Compare and challenge the existing service.
- Look for unmet needs.
- Shape the way your service is delivered.
- Measure satisfaction with the service.
- Prioritise future spending.
- Set targets for the service.
- Check out reaction to new ideas or initiatives.
- Look for quality improvements.
- Check opinions, views, attitudes.

It's probably most
of these and some
of your own.

Here are some ideas of the type of question areas you might want to ask

- What do people like most/least about the service?
- Is the standard or level of the service right?
- Is the frequency of the service acceptable?
- Is the service reliable?
- What takes too long?
- What about comfort, convenience, safety factors?
- How good is your customer service (eg helpfulness, friendliness)?
- Is the range of services available appropriate?
- Is the service equally accessible by everyone?
- Is there enough information available about the service?
- Is the service good value?

Ideally, you should
even consult people
on which questions to ask.

involving

action   evaluating

By now you should have identified the key stakeholders for your service and thought about what to ask them. You will now be able to decide **how** to go about it. Some key points are:

- Use tool 5 & 6 below to select some possible consultation methods (eg. focus group, survey etc).

- Think especially about the **different needs** of different people you wish to consult with – and get a representative sample.

- The Government say that we must use a range of methods for each consultation - one focus group will not do. You need to **'custom build'** a consultation solution for each service or issue.

- Build on what consultation you already have in place, and again look for opportunities to join up with other services/outside agencies. Conduct joint consultation where possible (see info about the 'Big List').

- If you are asking about satisfaction with your service, it is usually best to do this as soon as possible after the service has been delivered (eg. do a follow up phone call or survey card a few days later).

- You will probably need to use a mix of **'quantitative'** methods (eg. surveys where we can measure satisfaction or opinions/surveys numerically) and **'qualitative'** methods (eg. focus groups where we look for more in depth opinions or quality improvements).
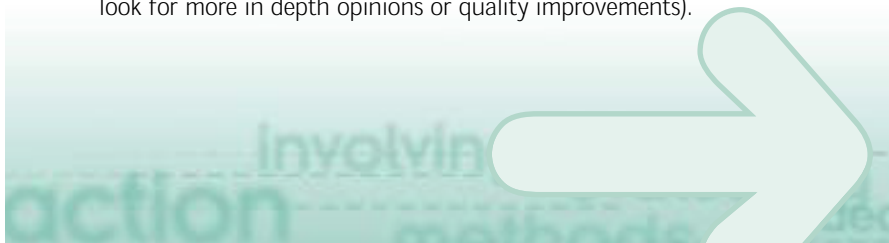
Different types of people prefer different consultation methods. Also some methods work better for some things than others.

Tools 5 & 6 should give you some ideas.

Some other thoughts are:

- PCC's Strategy Unit co-ordinate all consultation projects across the council. The **'Big List'** is an up to date list of hundreds of surveys etc that others have done at PCC, and a forward listing of planned projects. Please use it to see if there are previous projects which you could get information from, or to link up with a planned project. Use the contact info on the back page to tell us about your projects.

- You can ask the Strategy Unit for more **in depth advice** on selecting methods or we can put you in touch with others who have done similar things so you can pick their brains.

- There are currently two major surveys undertaken regularly by Portsmouth City Council.

  They all ask questions of 'ordinary' citizens. You can ask for questions to be incorporated into:

  1. **The Residents Survey** - A 1/2 hour personal interview conducted in 1,000 people's homes.

  2. **The Residents Postal Panel** - enables mail out questionnaires to 1,000 local people.

Phone 023 9283 4050 or email consult@portsmouthcc.gov.uk for the Big List or any help you may need.
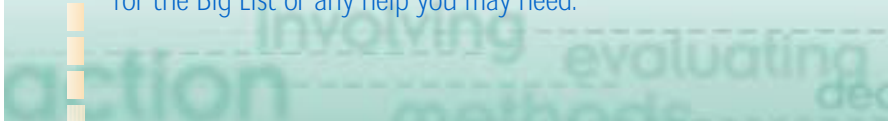
tool 5 | **local research has shown that different people prefer different consultation methods**

Here's a few clues:

- The most popular methods generally are 'having the information sent to them' and 'surveys' (ie) home based consultation.

- There is much less support for public meetings or anything that involves leaving the home.

- People on higher incomes are more likely to favour being on panels/groups etc.

- People on lower incomes are generally less keen on getting involved and feel 'information poor'

- Young people like focus groups and street interviews.

- Older people often like Neighbourhood Forums.

All consultation methods have strengths and weaknesses. Some are more 'representative' than others, some get a more 'in depth' response, some are best if you want a quick response:

- **Postal Surveys** often get a limited response (20% or less) but can be good for when you want to give information as well.

- **Focus Groups** explore issues in details from the customer's point of view. They are good for getting common sense opinions on complex issues.

- **Telephone Surveys** are great when you need a quick response and have simple questions.

- **Personal Interviews** are often the most statistically reliable method because you can control the number and type of people that you ask.

Use a mix of these methods to ensure you reach everyone.

which have been used by
Portsmouth City Council. The
further up the chart, the greater
the level of public involvement

*of which methods you m...
want to use*

- large scale community events
- policy conferences
- community associations
- round tables/users forums
- citizens juries
- deliberative focus groups
- tenants associations
- focus groups
- referendums
- simulations
- residents panel
- neighbourhood forum
- public meetings
- specific surveys
- ongoing surveys
- residents survey
- video box
- electronic polling
- quality check phone calls
- complaints and suggestions
- mystery shopper

use it!) this chart shows the main methods of consulting and involving people that you could use

	Description	Pros	Cons
...ttees/panels	Stakeholder involvement in decision-making bodies	Has real power. Shows users perspective of service provider	Users may get too close representativeness
...appraisal/audit	Local people conduct own study and prepare analysis and plan	Involves residents in whole process. Builds skills and local pride	Needs big input in training and support
...mmunity events	Various. Bring together locals to give views/produce plan	Can take very full view. Can build consensus and pride in result	Also needs much pre work and balancing ideas
...es	Extended large meeting, including key stakeholders, breaking into smaller workshops	Gets key people focused clearly on issue. Improves partnership and joined-up working	May be too big to achieve consensus or decision. Raises expectations
...ociations	Management committee for community centre	Builds local partnership, skills and involvement	Asks a lot from people. May miss majority view
...er forums	Groups of stakeholders meeting regularly to discuss issues	Bring in important variety of views, knowledge, etc. Can build consensus	Need to be well prepared and supported
	Extended group discussing issue and hearing/seeking advice	In-depth look at complex issues. Shows how evidence affects views.	Small selected group may lack credibility. Much work
...ups	Participants gather and have information and chance to discuss before giving opinion	Gets various points of view. Allows in-depth consideration. Shows how views change	Requires quite skilled preparation and facilitation
...ions	Body of tenants (or other stakeholders?) meeting formally	Very self-led, strong local involvement	May be a minority. May get adversarial
	Group of people talk about issues and share views	Good in-depth look, includes feelings, responses and results of discussion. Can look at certain types of people	Views of just a few may be misleading. People can change when in groups
	An open vote on a particular issue for all the public	Easy to understand. Gives a clear message. Open to all in theory	Big effort to set up. Usual turn-out worries
	Proposed arrangements or ideas are tried out in role-play with stakeholder representatives	May get good idea of complex and unpredictable possibilities. Shares points of view	Needs good facilitation and running. Can only involve a few people
	List of people who will respond to periodic surveys	Can be quicker and cheaper than one-off surveys. Gets into how views change, who thinks what and why.	Will pick out more interested types not the average person
...Forums	Locally-run bodies which hold public meetings on local issues	Address local issues. Independent image. Can respond to approaches.	Risk hearing only an active minority
	Open meeting called on specific issue	Allow expression of views on important current topic	Can be adversarial and dominated by minority. Not liked by most people
	Various research into customer needs, views, experience, etc.	Done well can be clear, fair and very informative. Can give good figures	Bad surveys can give poor information. May miss certain groups
	Monitoring of satisfaction with eg. high volume service	Brings standards into service evaluation. Shows trends over time. Can contact less vocal users.	Time-consuming
...ys	Wide-ranging survey, hundreds of interviews every 2 years.	High accuracy, credible. Trends over time. Representative sample.	Relatively expensive. Not quick.

stage four | start the consultation

START

You should now be at the stage where you can actually **implement** some consultation. It is important that we all stick to some basic standards. Use tool 7 as a checklist.

Some local authorities ask people's views, then

- Don't tell them what will happen with the results.

- Don't do anything with the results.

- Don't tell anyone the results.

- Do what they planned they were going to do anyway.

- Ask them the same things again next year.

We must make sure that we don't do the same.

TIP You could form a team of users/non-users to work with you to oversee the consultation process and use of results.

"You send us plans that are already sewn up and ask for our comments in two weeks, we need more time than that"

"Don't expect to get a few of us together and suddenly represent the whole community - that'll never happen"

Real PCC customer comments

Involving evaluating action methods

stage four | standards for consulting

Appendix F
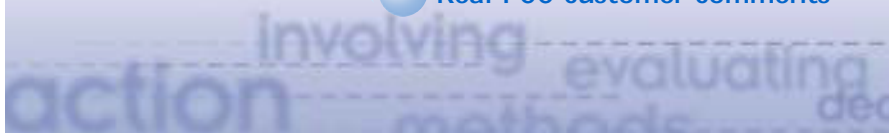
START

tool 7 | before you start

Ensure that consultees know:

- Who is being consulted and why. ▭
- What decisions will be influenced. ▭
- Who will take these decisions. ▭
- When the decisions will be taken. ▭
- How the results will be fed back to them. ▭
- That anonymity will be respected if requested. ▭
- Who they can contact if they are unhappy about the consultation. ▭

Ensure that you have:

- Used plain English and no jargon. ▭
- Avoided any leading or ambiguous questions. ▭
- Offered a choice of consultation methods. ▭
- Thought about involving 'hard to reach' people. ▭
- Made any special arrangements eg interpreters, hearing loops etc. ▭
- Thought about different peoples preferences in terms of methods. ▭
- Planned for how the views of different stakeholders groups
  will be 'weighed up' against each other. ▭
- Given people plenty of time to respond
  (12 weeks minimum for written consultations). ▭
- Decided who will do the consultation, in-house or an agency. ▭
- Successfully built consultation into your service review
 & planning process. ▭

There are, of course, lots of risks when consulting.

Some pitfalls to think about are:

- By consulting, you can easily raise expectations that things will change overnight, they won't. Be careful!

- If you consult on a decision that has already been taken, it will come back to haunt you. People know when we are doing 'token' consultation.

- Expect some conflict and pain - if you consult with a range of stakeholders, they will often have opposing views. It's the politician's role to decide how to respond - bearing all these views in mind.

- Don't just put on an event (eg focus groups or policy conference) and expect people to be interested and flock to it. You may need to work hard to engage them.

- If you only allow people to write in on an issue (say following a 'Flagship' article) you may just get unrepresentative responses.
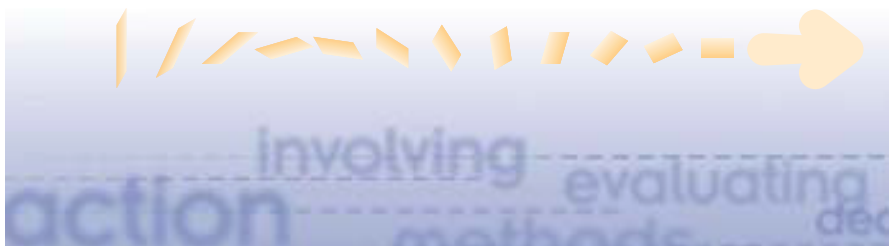
Just before you start - think about these things again:

Do you know . . . ?

- Who to consult - have you thought of everyone.
- Who's views will be most influential.
- That you have thought of the right' issues to focus on.
- That you have selected the most appropriate methods.
- How much it will cost and where the money is coming from.
- What decisions will be affected and when.
- That you have thought about the Data Protection Act and how it might relate to your consultation.

Make it short and sweet

One local council recently sent a 20 page questionnaire to 180,000 homes at a cost of £100,000. It took 3 hours to fill in and was sent back by just 85 (patient) people. That's £1,200 per response. Not best value!

stage four | the final stages

START

What happens after the consultation:

- Don't underestimate the amount of effort required to process data or write reports. Even if you get an agency to do it you may have a lot of work.

- Look at the broad picture painted by the range of consultation you have done. Where is there consensus or conflict?

- You will need to adopt some process for making quality improvements (big and small) based on what you have found out, and for taking any big decisions on budgets etc. Make sure you've thought this through, and keep evidence of why you carried out consultation in a particular way (for monitoring purposes).

- Do further consultation to test out your ideas on how to respond to the consultation (eg ideas for changes to the service).

- Don't be too concerned if the method failed. Evaluate and try again.

involving evaluating
action methods

tool 9 | evaluating consultation

Appendix F

START
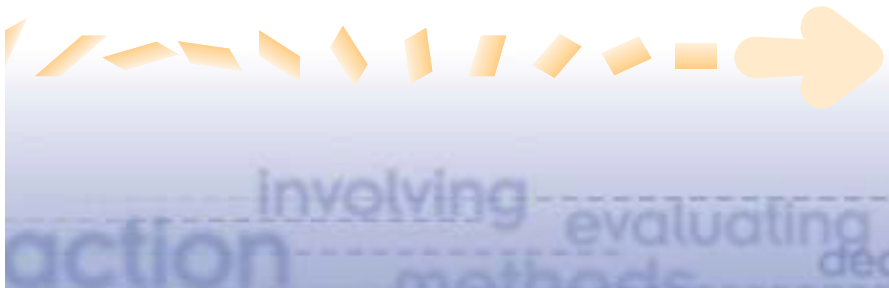
Local government generally has been attacked for never evaluating consultation.

We need to prove we're different.

Use this checklist when your consultation is over:

- Were the objectives understood by all stakeholders?
- Did the methods used match the objectives?
- Could we say that a representative set of views were obtained?
- Was the timescale/process transparent and kept to?
- Was the consultation accessible (eg translations, plain English etc)?
- Did you get to the hard to reach' people?
- What were the costs (including staff time)?
- Did it lead to a change of policy, service etc?
- How many people will be affected by the changes?

Think about what you could do better next time to make sure customers are at the heart of everything we do.

A full evaluation tool is available - call 023 9283 4050

you're not on your own

Hundreds of people across PCC are consulting and there are lots of corporate resources in place. Use the following numbers to ask about:

- Any personal advice you need on any aspect of consultation.
- Web resources to help you.
- Corporate surveys that you might be able to include questions in.
- Sharing best practice and working with others in PCC.
- Training, eg how to choose an agency or how to facilitate focus groups.
- If you want a large print version or a tape of this toolkit.

Please use the hotlines below to be better informed on consultation.

Best Value	023 9283 4704
Media, Communications, Publicity	023 9283 4176
Equalities Unit, involving hard to reach' people	023 9284 1450
Getting translations	023 9283 4012

Consultation hotline
023 9283 4050
email: consult@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP

13 August, 2007

PRESENT:

Councillor Paul Varnsverry   (Chair)
Councillor Tony Clarke

Thomas Hall   Corporate Manager
Lindsey Cameron   Participation Team Leader
Tracy Tiff   Scrutiny Officer

Councillor Brian Markham   Expert Witness – Item 4

1   APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor David Palethorpe and Councillor Andrew Simpson (Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1).

2   MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2007 were agreed as a true record.

3   SCOPE

The scope of the review, as amended, was agreed. Copy attached at Annex 1 to the minutes.

Following a brief discussion regarding Task and Finish Group scopes, Councillors suggested that the Chair take the following recommendations to the next meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee for consideration: -

- Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups reserve the right to broaden the scope of the review should further evidence be brought out from interviewing expert witnesses.

- A sentence should be added to the purpose/objective of the scope of Overview and Scrutiny reviews:

        The Committee will consider any points from the evidence submitted.

4(a)   Thomas Hall, Corporate Manager

T Hall, Corporate Manager briefly advised the Group of his role in relation to community engagement. Up until approximately 12 months ago, community engagement had been within his remit; this role has now been transferred to N Marzec, Corporate Manager. T Hall commented that he is involved in Safer, Stronger Northampton Partnership and that all Corporate Managers have a role to play in community engagement.

The Group then put its core questions to T Hall: -

1. **How well do you think the Council consults and engages with Community Groups? Please give examples**.

   We undertake consultation both with geographic groups – neighbourhoods for example – and sectoral groups. In my opinion this happens mainly when there are specific issues relating to those groups, rather than using them to get views on general issues. The CASPAR+NR partnership in Castle ward has consulted local people on plans for environmental improvements in their area; the Council's race equality scheme has been discussed through the Race Equality Forum. What I feel is lacking is a consistency or co-ordination to this, either in when it is done or how quality is ensured. We also under-use the opportunities that these groups offer to consult on general corporate issues – for example, what do older people feel about parks and open spaces.

   Engagement of course goes further, and I do not think that this Council is very far down that road. The idea behind neighbourhood management is to give a say in decision-making and resource allocation to local people but this is in its infancy here. One example which has occurred is the work with young people on how the 'Money for Youth' budget was to be spent.

2. **Do you think all Community Groups are adequately consulted? If not, please give details why.**

   No, and perhaps they never will be due to the changing nature of the community. It will always be easier for us to make links with groups that are more self-aware, usually well established and articulate, and may be localised. That means that new immigrant groups could lose out, especially as there will be a lag before we become aware of the significance of some groups or how to contact them. At other extremes, I feel that both Travellers and the business community might feel that they are not consulted except occasionally on very specific issues.

3. **How do you feel the Council's consultation mechanisms could be improved?**

   - Systematic – our consultation should be planned with a purpose and integrated into other planning and decision-making processes
   - Quality – consultation needs to be thought through and delivered well by people who understand the issues and pitfalls. But it also needs to give value for money, and the benefits from doing it should be spelled out in advance, along with the costs

Culture – we do not yet always see consultation (still less engagement) as a positive way of improving what we do, to be welcomed

Consultation could be improved by the Council having a bank of accessible knowledge for consultation that it could confidently rely upon the results.

There is a need for feedback to be given to those who participate in consultation. If their suggestions are not taken on board, they should be informed of this together with the reasoning. There is also the need to ensure that people understand how the information that they have provided has been used and why sometimes the Council decides not to do things that they have decided. T Hall confirmed that this type of feedback is happening internally across the Council but there is the need for it to be widened out externally.

4. **Do you feel that the Neighbourhood Management and Neighbourhood Partnership process engages adequately with all Groups? If not, please give details why.**

I am not fully aware of all that is being done through Neighbourhood Management; it is of course a relatively new way of working here and still needs to be embedded. The issues I raise above are relevant here (e.g. in 1 and 2), particularly that some groups are not concentrated in particular areas. For example, individuals from certain ethnic minority groups tend to live in specific neighbourhoods, and for them a Neighbourhood Management approach may be very helpful. But for others and for other sectors this will not be true – so far as I know there is not a particular part of town where the majority of our lesbian, gay and bisexual citizens live. Their distinctive voice probably needs other channels, to complement Neighbourhood Management.

I also feel that, inevitably, it will be the more established individuals and groups who will fit most easily into Neighbourhood Management (NM) structures unless we make a determined effort to reach beyond them. 'Community leaders' have an important role to play but we also need to be developing or encouraging new leaders. Language is likely to be a barrier, and not just for the more recently arrived groups; NM will need resources to communicate effectively with all their constituents.

5. **In your opinion what Community Groups should the Council be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new communities not currently represented?**

Among residents, I think that the geographical approach of NM supplemented with the 'sectoral' approach based on factors like age, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, gender is right. I feel that the Council should be able to engage with those who are 'hard to hear' but also encourage communities which have organised themselves to have a part. I am concerned about some groups whose needs may be great but could be excluded, particularly travellers, new populations from parts of the world with internal conflict such as Somalia where we can assume that those tensions persist in our local population, and the 'white non-British' group including East Europeans who are less visible but may be equally vulnerable.

The other groups which we may be in danger of ignoring are the non-residents, particularly businesses and those who work or play in the town. For example, any proposals around the town's major cultural facilities (theatres, museums etc) should take account of the wider area from which users are drawn.

6. **Any additional information that you feel would inform the review.**

We should take all opportunities to do consultation and engagement in partnership with other public agencies, who are all facing similar pressures. This not only provides greater efficiency, but presents a more 'joined up- face to the public. A good example is the consultation within local areas by the police Safer Community Teams on local priorities, work which is equally valuable to this Council.

The Task and Finish Group made comment on T Hall's responses above and asked supplementary questions: -

- The Council appears to be reactive in its approach to community engagement and there is a need for it to be more proactive but it was acknowledged that there would be occasions when it could only be reactive.

- It needs noting that individuals from other countries now residing in the UK need to be large enough before they are recognised as a specific group.

- Groups have common needs but it also needs to be acknowledged that individuals within the Groups also have distinctive, separate needs.

7 **Whose duty is it to engage/participate with sub cultures within the community, e.g. NBC, NCC, the Police, and Health Service?**

It is not a specific role for any one Agency but it is a role that needs to be undertaken. It could possibly be the Local Strategic Partnership as it is looking at community cohesion. It would also be beneficial to ascertain which Agency had the best resources, for example, engagement led by the Police might be inappropriate for some groups. Agencies need to liaise with each other.

8 **Is there a nationally symposia planned regarding community engagement approaches?**

There are a series of conferences available on various topics. There are also structured national debates. Whenever there are changes in Government policy, it is always accompanied by a flurry of opportunities of training and conferences.

9 **As an Authority it needs to ensure consultation is about what it does**

Communication and having dialogue with the public is a good thing. Ultimately, the point has got to be what the Council is going to do regarding service delivery. This must be the end goal. There are various methods of consultation. There is a need to demonstrate to external mentors that the Council is undertaking effective consultation with positive outcomes. The goal has to be to improve services and quality of life.

10 **As an author taking reports to Committee, would you feel it useful or cumbersome to have a specific implications section within the report on consultation?**

It might help. From previous experience, such paragraphs are often treated as `add on' pieces of work and Officers may or may not take them seriously, unless the author feels that they are important.

14. How should the Council engage with individuals where there is little or no engagement?

It is difficult. Consultation must be a voluntary process. If people choose to cut themselves off they cannot be forced to engage. A good question to ask such individuals would be to find out how they interact with the outside world, for example, television or radio. The Council could then consult via such methods but this would be very expensive.

T Hall added that the Police response to neighbourhood management is complicated. It already has its own agenda for neighbourhood policing. Safer Stronger Community Teams cover the whole of the town.

There is a need to address how the Council's service delivery aligns itself to the pressures arising from neighbourhood needs (example was Eastfield Park). The whole resources of the Council cannot be devoted to neighbourhood management due to other commitments and pressures. For example, NBC has budgets and resources for its parks and open spaces, together with a set programme of work. There are also national pressures. He acknowledged that the issue of resources being aligned to neighbourhood management needed resolving.

T Hall was thanked for his informative address.

L Cameron, Participation Team Leader, addressed the Group. He advised that he had been the Council's Diversity and Equality Officer for eight years prior to his current role. He concurred with the majority of T Hall's comments, adding the Council's partnerships and forums often refer to the Council's consultation mechanisms as consultation overload. He felt it would be beneficial to ask the community for its definition of consultation. Often complaints are made regarding the lack of feedback following consultation.

4(b) Councillor Brian Markham

Councillor Markham commented that he felt the general view of the public was that the Council was not bad at consulting but provision of feedback to the public on the outcomes was poor.

Councillor Markham reminded the Task and Finish Group of the good work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Public Engagement Task and Finish Group during 2005/2006, in particular the focus groups that it set up to engage with the public and groups. These focus groups had been very well received.

He then made reference to the review of the Area Partnerships and Forums that took place during 2006. This review coincided with the introduction of neighbourhood managed areas. Area Partnerships were not considered to be the future but further surveys have indicated that they have been welcomed by the public. He acknowledged that Area Partnerships and the Neighbourhood structure was a mechanism to engage with communities but questioned on what.

Partners need to join NBC in looking at services provided in areas, for example, Eastfield. Service provision and planning of services is all about community engagement.

Councillor Markham then expressed concern that only the managed Neighbourhood areas were supported by the Council's meetings services but the co ordinate areas did not have the same support. He felt that the managed areas would improve and the co ordinate areas

would not. He added that in his opinion, the whole neighbourhood partnership process did not appear to have been planned and co ordinated properly.

The Task and Finish Group then put its core questions to Councillor Brian Markham:

How well do you think the Council consults and engages with Community Groups? Please give examples.

I believe that Consultation and Engagement are often treated as being the same thing. They are not.

The Task and Finish Group should also consider whether this question goes far enough. Why should we only seek to consult and engage **Community Groups**? When it comes to **consultation** in practical terms this will often be limited to recognized or existing Forums, Residents Associations and Partners. When setting out to **engage we** need to be engaging a far larger section of the public at large or a particular "communities".

The Council has over recent years been keen to improve both consultation and engagement but this work has been left to a small number of, sometimes excellent, people but is not embedded through out the organisation. For example the original 8 Area Partnerships were under-resourced and in particular there was reluctance from some councillors to involve themselves in the concept.

Do you think all Community Groups are adequately consulted? If not, please give details why.

Community Groups may be consulted but "Are their views able to influence outcomes?" may be a better question. There is a genuine attempt by many to widen consultation and involve Community Groups through various forums and partnerships the problem has been whether or not the consultation has happened at an early enough stage to enable the results of the consultation to affect the outcome.

How do you feel the Council's consultation mechanisms could be improved?

By devoting more time to both **information** and **consultation** but being clear which is which.

Do you feel that the Neighbourhood Management and Neighbourhood Partnership process engages adequately with all Community Groups? If not, please give details why.

No but it could do.

The Borough and partners have signed up to developing a Neighbourhood Management model for both engaging the community and for delivery of improvement of services as identified in the LAA. Yet there appears to be little coordination between the various Managed Areas and Coordinated Areas.

Following this model requires both political commitment form all partners and resources both human and financial. None of these have been present in sufficient quantities so far.

In your opinion what Community Groups should the Council be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new communities not currently represented?

We should be seeking to engage everyone not groups or sections of society. However some sections of society have special interests or special needs I think that the existing Forums cater for most of those groups however the way they do this needs reviewing.

Any additional information that you feel would inform the review.

Last Year's Service Review of Area Partnerships and Community Forums, which also made recommendations on the introduction of Neighbourhood Partnerships both Managed and Coordinated, could help in your deliberations.

The Task and Finish Group made observations and asked supplementary questions:

- The Council has some excellent departments but it is apparent that there are some that are not so good.

- The Semilong Residents' Forum had a particular housing issue that it required clarification on. It asked for a Housing Officer to attend the last seven meetings. A query was forwarded why there had been non-attendance and it was reported that it was only voluntary for the Officer to attend such a Forum meeting. There is a need to recognise the Council's outward face, as such incidents appear to the public that the Council is not interested it its views.

- There needs to be more engagement across the Council departments. Community engagement is a priority for the Council.

When Northamptonshire County Council withdrew from the previous Area Partnership scheme did it introduce its own scheme?

NCC withdrew from the joint Area Partnerships with Borough Council and also ended its own Area Committee system. All Local Authorities had to work together to produce the Local Area Agreement (LAA); NCC took the lead in Northamptonshire. Neighbourhood management in Northampton is seen to have taken on board the work done by CASPAR and also as a delivery mechanism of information to deprived areas. Neighbourhood management requires commitment for it to work efficiently and effectively.

A Cabinet decision was made in 2006 to introduce neighbourhood management. The general approach and areas were also approved. Following the Cabinet meeting a serious of workshop, facilitated by a Government recommended facilitator on the workings of neighbourhood management were held.

Councillor Markham was thanked for his address.

The Task and Finish Group suggested that a possible recommendation of its final report could be:

That more work in the managed neighbourhood areas is required so that they can be up and running effectively and efficiently. It is noted that the process may take longer to introduce in the co-ordinated areas.

4(C) Written Evidence received so far

The Task and Finish Group noted the evidence received from:

- Mrs M Pritchard, Secretary, Federation of Residents' Associations
- Councillor Jean Hawkins, NBC
- Mr C Swinn, Vice Chair, NTACT
- Ms B Mennell, NTACT Member

Officers would produce a summary of the main points of all written evidence and produce it to the next meeting.

5 Officers' Reports

Groups the Council currently engages with

The list of the Groups that the Council currently engages with was noted

Glossary of Terms used by the Council – Community Engagement

The Glossary of Terms used by the Council in respect of Community Engagement was noted.

Review of the Report – NBC – Area Partnerships and Forums 2006

The Executive Summary and recommendations of the Report – NBC – Area Partnerships (2006) was noted.

Map detailing geographical areas of Neighbourhood Partnerships

The above map was noted.

Results of Desktop Research

The results of desktop research so far were noted.

The Group commented: -

- Portsmouth City Council's Consultation Toolkit was excellent and would be a good document to use when compiling the final report.

- The fact that Involve has been commissioned to create a web-based resource of information on community engagement should be referred to in the final report. This information had not yet been published but could be a useful tool for Local Authorities when carrying out consultation.

7   Any Other Business

The Chair commented that T Hall would be welcome to attend future meetings, if he felt it appropriate.

8   Date of Next Meeting

 The next meeting was noted as 23 August 2007 commencing at 2pm.

The final meeting was scheduled for 4 September 2007, at which the Chair's report would be finalised.

<div align="center">The meeting concluded at 4.10pm</div>

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

1. **Purpose/Objectives of the Review**

   - To review the Council's engagement activities, including Neighbourhood Management.

   - To review how community engagement could be improved and what Groups the Council should be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new and difficult to reach communities who are not currently represented.

2. **Outcomes Required**

   - To recommend mechanisms, practice and evaluation that enables all local people and Community Groups to have a voice.
   - To produce an outline and recommend the preparation of a Community Engagement Strategy.
   - To recommend methods to manage the information collected as a result of the improvement in engagement, in order that it informs policy-making, service delivery and design.

3. **Information Required**

   - An analysis of the Council's current method of engagement, including successes and failures of engaging with the community.
   - A synopsis of all information currently available.
   - Verbal evidence from employees, Borough and County Councillors.
   - Written evidence from community organisations and groups.
   - Best practice Councils.

4. **Format of Information**

   - Officer reports/presentations
   - Maps showing how areas are currently geographically split
   - Baseline data
   - Best practice external to Northampton
   - Witness interviews/evidence
   - Portfolio Holder evidence

5. **Methods Used to Gather Information**

   - Minutes of the meetings

- Desktop research
- Examples of best practice
- Witness Interviews/evidence: -
  - Community and Councillor Co-Chairs of the Community Forums
  - Residents' Associations
  - Parish Councils
  - Chair of Northampton Tenants and Council Together (NTACT)
  - Mrs B Mennell, member of NTACT
  - Faith Leaders
  - Community Leaders
  - NBC and NCC Councillors
  - T Hall, Corporate Manager, NBC
  - L Ambrose, Area Partnerships and Forums Co-Ordinator, NBC
  - P Gadhia, NCC
  - J Tinker, Strategic Neighbourhood Manager, NCC

6. Co-Options to the Review Committee

None for this review. However all Task and Finish Groups should consider the provision of an external advisor.

7. Evidence gathering Timetable

July – September 2007

30 July	Scoping the review
13 and 23 August	Evidence gathering
4 September	Finalise Chair's report

8. Responsible Officers

Lead Officers   Simone Wade
Co-ordinator   Tracy Tiff

9. Resources and Budget

Simone Wade, Policy and Governance Manager, and Thomas Hall, Corporate Manager, to provide support and advice.

10 Final report presented by:

Completed by September 2007. Presented by the Chair of the Task and Finish Group to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 and then to Cabinet.

11 Monitoring procedure:

To review the impact of the report after six months (March 2008).

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Thursday, 23 August 2007

PRESENT:

Councillor Paul Varnsverry - Chair
Councillor Tony Clarke

Simone Wade   - Policy and Governance Manager
 Tracy Tiff   - Scrutiny Officer

Expert Witnesses

L Ambrose   - Area Partnerships and Forums Co-Ordinator
C Swinn   - Vice Chair, NTACT

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Wilson and Councillor Simpson (Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1).

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 AUGUST 2007

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 August 2007 were agreed as a true record.

Councillor Clarke supported the amended scope of the review, in particular, the request that will be made to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 that Task and Finish Groups reserve the right to broaden their scopes should further evidence be brought out from witness evidence.

3 WITNESS EVIDENCE

(A)   PORTFOLIO HOLDER   - COUNCILLOR BRENDAN GLYNANE

It was agreed that as the timescale for interviewing Councillor Glynane was put back that he be asked to provide written evidence.

(B)   LINDSEY AMBROSE - AREA PARTNERSHIPS AND FORUMS CO-ORDINATOR

L Ambrose, Area Partnerships and Forums Co Ordinator, was interviewed by the Task and Finish Group. Examples of documents and materials that had been produced by the Forums, in particular, the Youth Forum, were circulated.

She referred to terminology and gave a definition of the following for the purposes of her responses: -

- **"Community Groups"** may refer to community organisations or to more broadly defined communities of interest including sometimes so-

called 'hard-to-reach groups' and those individuals from more newly arrived communities who may not yet be sufficiently established within the local community to have formed community organisations. For the purposes of my answers I am taking it to assume that the term used in the questions is referring to the broadest understanding of the phrase e.g. disabled people, women, ethnic minorities, etc and not only to community organisations in the voluntary or statutory sectors with formal constitutions and terms of reference.

- **"Community Engagement"** is a term which may include consulting, communication, involving etc of people in the community. It may occur in neighbourhood renewal, community development, community safety, leisure services etc. To some people working in the field it may have specific technical meanings.

L Ambrose then provided a response to the Group's core questions: -

1. How well do you think the Council consults and engages with Community Groups? Please give examples.

Need to follow up some pieces of work:-

- Community Engagement Task & Finish Group (spring 2006)
- Service Review of Area Partnerships and Forums (autumn 2006)
- Community Engagement Strategy and Consultation (2005)

Communities of Interest

   i.   **Youth**
        – **the Youth Forum**
           i. is acknowledged as a high flyer in the county at least; positive reputation e.g. the way in which youth are involved in Holocaust Memorial and community cohesion activities.
          ii. involves many hundreds of young people in Northampton each year e.g. via the schools in its annual elections process; has developed increasing diversity in its membership without targets. Current members include Muslim, catholic, C of E, a member who has lived in many countries around the world, a member who has come from Eastern Europe, members with disabilities, gifted young people, young people now at work, VI formers. It has one of the broadest age ranges in the county with its youngest member being 12 years old.
         iii. established links to Countywide youth Forum and UK Youth Parliament; many links to school councils in accordance with best practice, helping the young people to work with young people in and from localities of Northampton.

iv. links with local radio – e.g. radio interviews on the multi-cultural countywide radio station Inspiration FM on BBC Radio Northampton. It has also featured on Northants 96 during 2007.

v. information sometimes goes to the supplementary schools in Northampton too, enabling communication and potential involvement of young people from newly-arriving communities.

vi. good working relationships with key contacts in schools which e.g. through contact with Kingsthorpe Community College involved around 200 young people in responding to work undertaken by Scrutiny on Leisure Services; I worked with schools in 2006 to make links to Local Democracy Week and Citizenship curriculum, resulting in Northampton having excellent numbers of ideas for new youth projects being sent in for Youth Forum to shortlist from. Some schools have put up noticeboards to help young people find out what their reps are doing.

vii. The Youth Forum has recently used money 4 youth funding to address comments from youth about not knowing where to find out what's on. In relation to the Youth Festival they organised, they purchase a significant amount of freebie rulers, key-rings, bugs and pens which feature its web pages (www.northampton.gov.uk/forums) to help young people day to day benefit from information there e.g. useful links to get involved in projects and community activities, and to find out what's done by Forum members. They also took these to Balloon Festival and Duston Day in the Park.

Money 4 Youth (Youth Opportunities Fund and Youth Capital Fund)

viii. Since August Northampton's Youth Forum has managed over £200K of funding for youth. It has used the opportunity to extend its engagement to young people not previously involved via organisations such as Pupil Referral Units, Youth Offending Teams, and Northampton Town Football in the Community, Young Carers etc. Current figures show over 1200 young people recorded as participating in the various projects all over Northampton. The scheme comes to an end in March 2008. It may continue – final central govt advice awaited.

ix. The scheme has enabled the Youth Forum to support Neighbourhood Management activities e.g. funding projects in Eastfield (YMCA bus project – which went on to involve wider community in clean-up project), King's Heath and Castle/Spring Boroughs.

x. The scheme has enabled the Youth Forum to support

> community cohesion and provide opportunities to break down barriers by funding projects open to all which are for learning activates such as steel pans, dhol drums and kabbadi.
>
> xi. Mayor's certificates proved popular with youth and youth workers. These get sent out to thank young people for caring enough to send in ideas, whether or not the project idea goes on to be created.
>
> xii. All projects are technically partnerships of NBC with a community organisation. The money, which came from central government, has enabled the Council to engage with (by reaching into, supporting, investing in, and enabling) communities at a time when such investment would not otherwise have been possible.
>
> xiii. this scheme has proven popular, generating community good will and positive perceptions of youth. Some projects have attracted external or match-funding. It has light monitoring requirements.
>
> xiv. I personally feel that the Council's engagement would benefit by allocating small grants-making functions to Youth and other forums in the future.

Disabled People's Forum

– increasing involved statutory sector organisations, not previously involved.

– The Forum has been involved, along with others, in the statutory consultation required to devise a Disability Equality Scheme. The engagement would be better in future if the Forum's objectives were to specify a responsibility around this.

– The forum has naturally attracted people with a range of disabilities and professional interests in disability. Its members include key statutory sector, voluntary sector groups and individuals with disabilities who may participate in community groups or community activities. Sometimes individuals indicate that the way their little group or networks are organised does not fit with the concept of having a single representative – that would only happen for larger, more formally established voluntary and community groups.

– The engagement would be better if we had enough budget to be able to produce posters or even a general leaflet about the Forum so that more people could know about it. Budget only just about covers basic meetings and taxi costs (for those without cars and unable to use public transport). We also do not have budget to pay expenses in the way we would for volunteering activities, so this limits how much can reasonably be asked in terms of people who attend meetings.

– The Forum has successfully influenced council decisions and service-developments. It would be better if the Council made

more use of the Forums.

– The Access Group's remit has recently been passed to this Forum, without prior consultation, as a budget saving. There are some potential advantages to this. However, one weakness is capacity in terms of officer support another is the loss of budget previously associated with participation in that group.

– I personally feel that it would be an enhancement if links to localities and local area forum working (NPs/NMAs) were established. Beneficial outcomes could include: avoiding/reducing duplication, being able to see when issues are not just 'local' but are part of a bigger picture that should be addressed as such, maximising capacity of council officers and partners e.g. in putting on events involving the community.

Pensioners Forum

o Recently made links to countywide working through NCC's Active Ageing Network and Northants Older People's Advisory Group; Older People's Champion for NBC now a member; it would be better to have more direct links to the Local Area Agreement.

o membership, in line with best practice, of BGOP (Better Government for Older People) applies to the Forum itself. The membership gives, via NOPAG and otherwise, a line of communication to/from central government. BGOP is supported by all the main political parties.

o The Forum has for many years belonged to the NPC (National Pensioners Convention – national non-party political umbrella group) and has taken an active role with it.

o The Forum has many members who are active in one or more small community groups, but who request to be recorded as 'individuals' on the Minutes of meetings.

o Other issues are much as for Disabled people's forum.

LGB People's Forum and NIAG (Hate Crimes Forum)

– This Forum is strong in a 'representative' way, but relies heavily on a currently mostly unfunded relationship with NLGBA to work well. NLGBA has given NBC a lot of positive publicity free in their newsletter that goes to many organisations and their 300 members e.g. the Council's support for International Day Against Homophobia (taking part with community members in one minute's noise and speeches on the Guildhall steps) featured as front-page news in their OUTAKE newsletter.

– The loss of Sean Silver and changes to the county hate crimes forums structure have left us currently with a lot of uncertainty about where work done by NIAG fits. NIAG is a multi-agency group which has undertaken both best practice development and hate crimes casework. It would be better to resolve the relationship of NIAG to the Forum – there is some interest in taking its best practice work into the LGBF as this fits well and would make sense. Casework is likely to move to the Police.

- Other issues are much as for Disabled People's Forum
- People need to bear in mind that it can be especially difficult for LGB community members to attend big gatherings (e.g. single equality forum), due to risks of 'outing' themselves. A safe space is important.

Race Equality Forum and MAGRAH (Hate Crimes Forum)
- The development of NBC's race equality scheme has been much more officer-owned than that of the disability equality scheme, so the forum has had little inputs – just periodically heard updates and been able to comment. Progress towards the Equality Standard has also been slow over past years. The Forum members have sometimes expressed interest in supporting NBC to improve.
- The forum's useful links web page has been popular with community organisations, several of whom have got in touch to ask to be added to it.
- It has operated separately to the MAGRAH, but has included some of the same faces.
- There is an unclear relationship to the BME SRP (BME Sub-Regional Partnership).
- The Forum particularly is weak when trying to do Agenda-based meetings, which may not feel welcoming. It has been at its best when actively engaging community e.g. Refugee Week Event 2006 which broke down barriers to the involvement of more newly arrived communities around some planned activity with identifiable outcomes.
- Refugee and newer-arrived communities are also sometimes engaged through Holocaust Memorial activities
- Engagement of REF would be better too if we had clear plans with outcomes approved by councillors.

Women's Forum
- This has lacked clear objectives and terms of references
- It's meetings have been poorly attended. The Agenda-style lunchtime Minutes meetings is not engaging with a broad spectrum of women.
- The Women's Day annual event attracted a wide range of communities and age ranges as 'International Women's Day' in 2006 with an Agenda which did not involve particularly party political speakers and was issues-based e.g. working in partnership with the Domestic Violence Forum and WNDC. The event is one of many around Women's Day in Northampton. This can make it difficult to organise as resources are stretched around similar activities in localities.
- Other networks use specifically targeted means to reach different groups of women, respecting the many lifestyles of women.
- The Forum has drawn criticism for excluding men as these days absent fathers, step-parenting, paternity leave, childcare issues,

school run, taking leave in school holidays, being victims of domestic violence are known to impact on men as well as women yet in considering community engagement the current forums structure does not recognise this and seems to single out 'women' only in relation to getting feedback and views.

– Engagement might be better addressed if we planned specific engagement for business community or for families with agreed target outcomes.

Holocaust Memorial Steering Group

– The group has had its work nationally recognised, via Sean Silver's award by the Anne Frank Trust. The Trust is now represented on the Group. It brings together community representatives from across many sectors of the community, including some of the often less visible groups e.g. travellers, refugees as well as Forums and more established groups. It has a well-respected credibility for its community cohesion activities and many schools want to be involved.

– The work is to be further enhanced by running Anne Frank Ambassadors and a local awards scheme from 2008 to celebrate positive contributions of youth and educators in the community.

General Personal Views

– The Museums Service has a popular Over 60s club. In terms of Forums activities, members of the community have led inputting ideas for sessions done at their events/open meetings. The work has sometimes challenged perceptions of museums e.g. involving young people.

– Police Safer Community Team**s** are, I understand, tending to get feedback from majority groups as in other parts of the country but may be interested in working with our Forums as well as NPs/NMAs.

– The Council

　　i. Needs to produce plain English documents (as per Plain English Campaign guidance)

　　ii. Minutes would be more meaningful if they were notes that responded primarily to the needs of the intended audience e.g. pictures, plain English, insert helpful contact details etc. Page numbers would help too.

　　iii. Needs to produce user-friendly guides e.g. re Planning to help people have their say/voice objections appropriately etc.

　　iv. Needs to let people know easily e.g. by self-help on-line/leaflets about how to have a say in meetings, what to expect etc. It's good that we have some council meetings outside of working hours

　　v. The council needs to do more Youth Festival-type activities to help its customers know about opportunities.

　　vi. The council ought to have service plans that give

commitments to communicating news, commitments to considering using the range of mechanisms for consultations etc

vii. It would be good if the community could have a voice in equality impact assessment processes e.g. to help people in thinking about issues such as sexuality for which they may not be aware or used to thinking through about barriers that may face people.

Do you think all Community Groups are adequately consulted? If not, please give details why.

The Council could make better use of its existing engagement and consultation mechanisms.

The Council needs to do more planning about how, when and why to involve residents via Neighbourhood Partnerships and Forums.

The Neighbourhood Managed area co-ordinators need to begin meetings with the public soon. I need to be in the loop too to help people find out about how to get involved if they call and also to update the web pages so that people can self-help.

I have received various positive feedback comments re the pages I've created re NMs and NPs, feedback that some people are passing on the web page links to their networks and using information on them. I've had requests from the community and council officers to add their information, so the basic format and approach seems to be on the right lines

The Council has made successive budget cuts to my service area so that it's now difficult to go out into localities to liaise with groups as much as I think would be optimal. I attend NP meetings and some community activities e.g. Duston Day in Park, Balloon Festival, Delapre Fete, Northampton Carnival as and when I can with Youth and other Forums. On the other hand, Money 4 youth has helped to overcome and add value to the contributions I've been able to make as through this community-led small grants process we've created good relationships and extended community capacity to help them to help themselves.

Residents sometimes complain about the over-reliance of the council on the web

It would be better if we made our web attachments more accessible e.g. for people using screen-readers.

It would be better if we designed all our documents to be accessible e.g. many more staff trained on accessibility in relation to colour-blindness, use of mixed cases, use of shadowing and images, use of text boxes and tables, use of word art, use of fonts, use of justified text, use of white space etc. By not

embedding such know how into our work in many ways in which we engage, invite, consult etc we exclude people who need us to work to good practice standards for them to be able to feel welcomed and able to participate. They shouldn't have to ask for alternatives so that they can join in too. We should be looking to the RNIB See It Right guidance and Plain English guidance where possible.

How do you feel the Council's consultation mechanisms could be improved?

Put a simple web page on the NBC web pages that links to the various types of meeting we have and explains rules for attendance, speaking, handing in petitions and letters etc – respecting existing web pages but bringing links to them together in one place for the benefit of people who wouldn't know to search for the individual types so wouldn't be likely to include the jargon names in any web search or who may look under 'meetings' for this sort of information.

On the web-site under the heading "Council – general information" remove the current content and replace with content about how the council works, role of councillors etc and links to other pages e.g. lists of councillors, Cabinet etc on the web-site, engagement mechanisms such as re neighbourhood partnerships and forums.

Set up a cross-departmental standing group to liaise about consultation, best practice, planned activities and their communication externally (including giving notice to the Voluntary and Community Sector to help comply with the Compact). That way we can pull together who's doing what and when, whether there are opportunities to ask questions in the same piece of activity on behalf of different teams, plan to make use of mechanisms such as forums, neighbourhood wardens, web etc, maximise capacity and resources and make sure we don't get other people feeling overwhelmed with consultation or feeling we keep asking them the same things.

Youth Forum is currently purchasing a video kiosk the council will be able to use for consultation activities. It should burn DVDs, allow for short film plays as part of surveys, allow for audio and visual or push-button on-screen response for up to 8 questions in a survey. It's portable so can be taken to various locations. It's a means of consultation that complies with good practice for groups such as young people and those with limited knowledge of written English.

When we do surveys it would be good if we could improve our questionnaires e.g. bearing in mind what helps people to fill them in, considering the use to which information will be put – is it meaningful? Measurable?

Revise community funding by NBC to include some small grants making by Forums with the sorts of criteria and processes reflecting those of the money 4 youth scheme.

Put listings of planned consultation, Scrutiny etc activities on the web-site

Train staff on the strengths and weaknesses of various consultation mechanisms

Use the community to help inform service planning

Use plain English wherever possible. Check it's not only plain but right for different groups by asking Forums etc to check over draft documents e.g. intended for young people.

4. **Do you feel that the Neighbourhood Management and Neighbourhood Partnership process engages adequately with all Community Groups? If not, please give details why.**

No. There will also be a need to create safe spaces for particular communities of interest to be able to engage in person too to discuss in more detail issues re disability, sexuality. A structure which has Forums, Neighbourhood Managed Areas and Neighbourhood Partnerships working more closely and awareness of this with NCC across its service areas would be good.

SCTs don't deal with hate crime incidents

Young people are often doing homework etc so can't get to NP meetings and good practice wouldn't tend to put pressure on them to go to NP meetings. (Youth Forum meets times that don't conflict with school demands). They are often at school or at work in the daytime and need to prioritise that over day-time activities. Youth Forum would be pleased to work more with NMAs and NPs in the school holidays e.g. supporting community events.

People reliant on public transport often can't get to and more especially from meetings.

The publicity needs to be improved – we need a communications strategy and local knowledge.

The format of Minutes and Agendas is not a good fit to what engagement is about. We need to think about what readers want and work towards that e.g. putting contact details so that they can find out more and adding follow up right alongside points, or being more like a newsletter, more user-friendly, action points clearly set out.

The annual consultation about meeting dates needs to include not just managers and councillors but also key community organisations to make sure our meetings don't clash with people who we hope will be at them. It may not always be possible but it would be good to aim for a 'best fit' approach.

In your opinion what Community Groups should the Council be engaging

with, in particular how it should engage with new communities not currently represented?

The Council should be working in the localities and also through town-wide forums to engage effectively with

- Disabled people
- LGB people
- Youth
- Older People (not just existing Pensioners)
- Families (not just women)
- Faith-Based and Ethnic Minority Communities

The inter-faiths forum for the town wants to have more involvement and has asked me to be an NBC link. I would like to do this. It fits well with my other work e.g. re HMD and BME communities.

The forums should be able to work through both public meetings and other means. Communications should include web, email, text, working groups, joint forums activities and linkages to Neighbourhood management/Neighbourhood partnerships. Some small grants funding involvement would be good.

The forums co-ordinator should have capacity to be able to spend more time in the localities and with newer-arrived groups, building up trust and respect and breaking down barriers to do specific pieces of activity and encourage participation in the Forums and Neighbourhood Partnerships.

There should be small grants-funding via forums and neighbourhood partnerships which enables new projects to be set up in localities, thus acknowledging and respecting new and changing potentially unmet needs and also informing us of perceptions of need out in the community.

There should be customer service standards in respect of following up action points from meetings by the officers who attend them and give commitments to do certain things for people.

Any additional information that you feel would inform the review.

Improve the way in which meetings are supported to be user-friendlier.

Please change house styles of writing to be more accessible to the community.

Please let the forums have enough budget to be able to do some publicity or consider more activities in localities where transporting things and rental of venues or marquee hire may be issues.

Consider having a store of things we can loan to the community – Youth Forum has

bought a portable stage and PA system which are being loaned out to enable community to put on events. More of this sort of thing could help us to help the community help themselves and build capacity where we can have shared resources.

The Task and Finish Group commented, asked supplementary questions and heard:

- I believe that it would be appropriate for the Chief Executive to ensure that Departmental Service Plans inform and show that consultation has taken place using the range of the council's engagement and consultation mechanisms, and if not why not.
- Documents should be produced in easy to read fonts and styles, in plain English to enable people to participate
- In response to a query regarding ensuring that Forums engage properly, L Ambrose advised that the Youth Forum is working well and suggested it has some good practices and successes that can be drawn on for learning re other engagement. She noted it has representation both from schools and from individuals on behalf of different groups or just as interested individuals.
- Forums and Area Partnerships need to be accessible to people and this could be improved in line with the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Public Engagement Task and Finish Group that concluded its work in 2006, which identified some good ideas such as the production of newsletters rather than formal minutes and the Service Review of autumn 2006.

L Ambrose was commended on her work and thanked for her informative address.

(C)   MR CHRIS SWINN

Mr Chris Swinn, Vice Chair N-TACT, addressed the Task and Finish Group. He had previously submitted written evidence to the Group's core questions and asked that a couple of statements that he had made in it be retracted. This was agreed and Mr Swinn's amended evidence is attached at Annex 1 to the minutes.

Mr Swinn then referred to the Council's consultation mechanism. He commented that up until September 2006 citizens had had the right to address Full Council on any agenda item. This right had now been removed. He felt this was undemocratic and unethical. Citizens should have the right to challenge the Administration, which helps to keep checks and balances to any modern democratic society. The public can now only address Full Council on Motions. Mr Swinn felt that many motions were in most cases just statements of fact. Personally, he would want to address Full Council meetings under the agenda item `Portfolio Holder Presentations' and Policy items. Previously the average number of public speakers at Full Council had been about three and never more than ten compared to the County Council when thirty-five spoke to 'Budget Cuts in Social Care' in 2006.
Mr Swinn felt that the change of the Public Speaking Protocol at Full Council could be a breach of human rights. He asked the Task and Finish Group to consider the Council's Public Speaking Protocol in its work.

He then referred to his written evidence to the Group's core questions, commending

the Public Engagement Task and Finish Group's Focus Group consultation days; adding that participants had received excellent feedback. He added that in his opinion the consultation process for Neighbourhood Management in Castle ward had been extremely poor. He felt that the Council needed to improve the way in which it consults.

Mr Swinn concluded his address by stating that the Council should welcome input from residents and visitors to the town and make information readily available. All information should be published, including `poor performance' information, such as the CPA progress report.

The Group asked supplementary questions-

The Constitutional Working Group investigated the business of the Council and its suggestion regarding public speaking was agreed by all Councillors.
Mr Swinn felt that the public should be given an opportunity to speak on any agenda item and given their permitted three minutes time slot. No citizen should be denied the right and opportunity to speak.

Would you agree that a number of people have come to Full Council to air their views and this is a failure on the Council's consultation and engagement methods?
The problem is it needs to be judicious. For judgements to be safe they need to be challenged at every stage of the democratic process. Many Councillors now do not hold surgeries. Area Partnerships were a failure and there is a need for Councillors to engage at `grass roots level.' Mr Swinn gave an example that in Australia, Street and Precinct Committees are held before the reports are discussed by the Local Council. Full Council is almost the last opportunity for concerned citizens to influence its final decision other than Overview and Scrutiny should there be a need for a 'call in'.

Is it more a question of who is allowed to speak and does the Constitution allow a comfort zone?
There has been a problem about the lack of time able to address. Officers and members reports are too often published to the website on the same day and only hours before the meeting. At Mayor Making on 24 May 2007, the Monitoring Officer put Political Structures on the agenda without prior notification and the public had no opportunity to address Full Council because it was 'Invitation Only'. The legal requirement is to publish an agenda five working days prior to the meeting. Mr Swinn gave further examples of late submissions to Cabinet with reports only being made available at the meetings. He felt that if a report was not available at the time of agenda dispatch that it should be deferred to the next meeting.

Mr Swinn was thanked for his address.

(D) COUNCILLOR DAVID PERKINS - MEMBER OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL WORKING GROUP

Councillor Perkins was unable to attend to the meeting due to a conflicting engagement and submitted a written response as detailed below: -

The constitutional working party was charged with the responsibility of providing recommendations to update the Councils constitution and was appointed in the light of the "Poor" status given to Northampton Borough Council following the Audit Commissions CPA report in 2004/5. It was acknowledged that part of the problem was to update the workings of Council, Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny. Recommendations were made by the working party to council on at least two occasions and accepted with some amendments by council on all occasions. I understand that the new constitution will be issued in its entirety sometime in September.

In considering the workings of Council, Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny, one aspect which was discussed at length by the working party was the opportunity of the public to engage with the elected members at these meetings. It was agreed by all the party representatives that democratic engagement was to be encouraged but it was also recognised that in the past the way in which the public had been allowed to engage at these meetings had resulted in meetings being hijacked to the point where the business of the council was being disrupted.

This was particularly true of Council meetings. It was recognised that the authority of the Council had been diminished by repeated meetings where important statutory reports had been tabled for discussion at Council but had either not been discussed or limited discussion had taken place due to lack of time. Quite often the reason for this was that precedence was given to debating political motions rather than the statutory business of Council. The all party working group acknowledged that for the council to improve its "Poor" status it was essential to change the way these meetings were conducted whilst at the same time preserving the right for the community to engage with the elected representatives. The following was therefore agreed:

Council

1. A half hour slot was to be included at the early part of the Council agenda for the public to put questions to Council. A notice period was required for such questions. If any questions were unanswered at the end of this period a written response was to be provided.

2. Motions would be debated after Council business had been attended too and the public would have the right to speak to motions on giving the appropriate notice.

3. Prior to the Council meeting, if the party whips and leaders agreed that an issue had emerged which was of such interest to the public that to allow it to be debated during a Council meeting would result in insufficient time being available for a) the issue to be aired probably and b) for the Council to conclude its own business, then a separate public meeting would be organised at the earliest possible time to enable the issue to be debated.

Cabinet

The right of the public to speak at cabinet was retained subject to the appropriate notice being given of the desire to speak. A limit of 3 minutes was given for each speaker.

Overview and Scrutiny

The right of the public to speak at Overview and Scrutiny was retained. Prior notice is not required and members of the public who wish to speak to the committee would indicate to the chairman.

4   FURTHER RESULTS OF DESKTOP RESEARCH

The Task and Finish Group noted further results of the Scrutiny Officer's desktop research.

Concern was expressed regarding the bad press that Northamptonshire County Council's Public Engagement Strategy had received. Its action plan had reported that the Residents' Panel would be re-launched by July 2007, its Toolkit by August 2007 and a Director would be established by September 2007.   However the Residents' Panel had not been re-launched, neither had the Toolkit.

S Wade advised that NBC had had many Citizens' Panels but there was a need to decide seriously how the Council would take the public's views and not just consult to `tick boxes'.

The Task and Finish Group commented and heard: -

- Citizens' Panels function well when operated in a suitable manner by peer Councils. They can remove a significant knowledge of background complaints.
- There is a need for mechanisms that are not going to make it harder for staff to consult and for people to attend meetings.   Issuing consultations at random, for example, to 500 households would produce clean data.
- If an advert goes out asking for 1,000 individuals to make up the Citizens' Panel it is possible that many of these will be regular consultees and attendees at Council meetings. Random consultation would achieve purer responses.
- It would be beneficial to offer incentives for responses.
- One size will not fit all methods of Council consultation. It needs to be ensured that the Council has the ability to use all consultation tools and has a broad approach.
- Citizens' Panels and sampling techniques are very resource intensive. To keep the Panel engaged takes a lot of effort. Without the appropriate software support this can be very difficult.
- There is a need for consideration to be given to linking the Borough's consultations with that of NCC.
- Contracting out to a company to undertake consultation often works well and can be very cost effective, for example providing telephone numbers to a

company who would call and charge 8 pence per 60-second response. This works out cheaper than sending letters out. **This was suggested as a possible recommendation.**

- The budget consultation held during 2006 was very successful as it had been so contentious. The role of Overview and Scrutiny is to challenge the current status quo.

5 EXPERT WITNESS RESPONSES

The Task and Finish Group noted further expert witness responses.

(A) SUMMARY OF WRITTEN EXPERT EVIDENCE RECEIVED

The Task and Finish Group noted the summary of expert witness evidence received.

6 SUGGESTED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCLUSION IN THE CHAIR'S REPORT

The Task and Finish Group suggested potential conclusions and recommendations for inclusion in the Chair's final report: - (potential recommendations in bold)

- That all Overview and Scrutiny Review reports be enacted and the recommendations monitored.
  The Scrutiny Officer advised that Overview and Scrutiny has a rigorous monitoring process and the Portfolio Holder is requested to provide a progress report six months after the report has been accepted by Cabinet.
- **That the Task and Finish Group requests that all of the recommendations detailed below are implemented in order that the improvements that this Task and Finish Group seeks can be delivered:**
- **That reports to Full Council and Cabinet contain an implications paragraph on Community Engagement and Consultation.**
- **That Portsmouth City Council's Consultation Toolkit is an example of best practice and Cabinet be asked to consider this document when devising a Consultation Toolkit for the borough.**
- There is a need to find ways to encourage citizens to speak at public Council meetings. The Task and Finish Group challenges the culture and the Council's Constitution in relation to public speaking and how it impacts on the Council's image.
- The Council appears to be in defensive mode and often buries bad news stories rather than publish them. It is acceptable for the Council to report that as an authority it has failed and to accept and acknowledge any mistakes made. **That for the public to be more trusting of the Council, it has to be open and transparent in reporting all of its activities.**
- **That the mechanisms of receiving public feedback be examined and a policy produced. The mechanisms for reporting back from Neighbourhood Management (NMs) need to ensure that information comes back from NMs needs to be reported to the relevant Council departments.**
- **The philosophy of Neighbourhood Management needs to be extended across the whole town. Each area should have its own**

> Communication/Participation Plan that is resourced by the Council. Within this there should be a feedback mechanism.

- A lot of citizens have expressed concern at the loss of Area Partnerships and there is a need to demonstrate that momentum has not been lost for example Neighbourhood Partnership meetings should be held quarterly. **That Neighbourhood Partnerships be fully resourced in order that their role can be enhanced.**

- **That Parish Councils be contacted and provided with details of the plans for neighbourhood management. It should be stated that where the Council is aware of any overlap of duties and in that area there is an active Parish Council that the Parish Council complies, for example by hosting public meetings. The Council would not wish to be involved but it would need to ensure that Parish Councils sign up to its Protocol if a particular Parish Council did not want a Neighbourhood Partnership within their area.**

- **That it be recognised that the Neighbourhood boundaries are not fixed and may need to be reviewed once sufficient evidence for change is established. These boundaries may change and evolve.**

- **That there be a Policy of Promotion and Attraction for Neighbourhood Management.**

- **That it be ensured that hard to reach groups are engaged with.**

- **That a consultation budget of £ (need figure) be implemented.**

- Contracting out to a company to undertake consultation often works well and can be very cost effective, for example providing telephone numbers to a company who would call and charge 8 pence per 60-second response. This works out cheaper than sending letters out. **That consideration be given to contracting out consultation exercises to external companies to contact random consultees by telephone rather than letter.**

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was none.

8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The last meeting was noted as 4 September 2007 commencing at 2pm to finalise the Chair's report.

The meeting concluded at 4:20 pm

Appendix H

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Response from Chris Swinn. Vice Chair N-TACT
The Science of Citizenship:
"In making governance work, you have got to get the physics right – the structures – but you've also got to deal with the chemistry, the emotions involved.

The Community at large has been disempowered, disenfranchised and disengaged from the paramount and peak decision-making body the Full Council
Community Engagement is about involving the Citizens in decision-making.
First Things First - Change the Council Constitution back to what the Citizens had before September 2006. Allow Public to Address any Agenda Item at Full Council Meetings and return the Power to People to have their say, before it's too late.
Is this Modern 21st Century Participatory Democracy?

Q1) How well do you think the Council consults with you? Please give examples.

There has been inconsistency from consultation to consultation due to the obvious lack of strategy, protocols and rules of engagement.
I.e. The Ground Rules - The Do's and Don'ts

Good Consultations: 3 Stars
1) **Public Engagement and Communication Task & Finish Group (Simple the Best – Bench Mark**
2) **Budget Consultation 2004 / 2006**
3) **Vision 2035**
4) **Budget Consultation 2006 / 2007**
Fair Consultations: 2 Stars
1) **Budget Consultation 2005 / 2006**
2) **Neighbourhood Management Training, Workshop and information Sessions at the Guildhall and Community Forums and Area Partnerships**
Bad / Poor Consultations: 1 Star
1) **Housing Options Appraisal 2004 / 2005**
2) **Castle Ward CASPAR 3 + Neighbourhood Management 2005 to present day**
3) **Housing Strategy 2006 to 2011**
4) **BME Housing Strategy**
No Consultation: Nul Point / Zero Star
1) **Housing Allocation Policy Interim Changes**
2) **Neighbourhood Partnerships**

Q2) Do you think all Community Groups are adequately consulted? If not, please give details why.
No! Officers and Councillors need to get out about more and Listen, Learn, Talk to and Build Trust and Confidence with the Customers, the Citizens of our Great City
1) **Consultations tend to be Guildhall centred with same old familiar faces**
2) **We have four District Shopping Centres in Duston, Kingsthorpe, Mereway and Weston Flavell so use them**
3) **Community Centres and Community Rooms are under utilised, so use them.**
4) **Community Notice Boards Install them and then use them**
5) **Communicate – Communicate – Communicate Use the Media Press, Free Press, Radio and TV - All Publicity is good even when its bad – Promote Citizenry and the Council – Attract Citizens and Community Champions - Turn Weaknesses into Strengths and Threats into Opportunities**

Q3) How do you feel the Council's consultation mechanisms could be improved?

1) **Develop and Implement, the NBC Community Engagement, Citizens Participation, Communication and Consultation Strategy and Action Plan then Monitor and Review it Quarterly**

2) **Be Consistent, Open, Transparent and Honest at all Times**
3) **Councillors as Paramount Community Leaders need to hold regular rotating weekly Surgeries and Walkabouts with Residents.**
4) **Proactively Develop New Residents Associations, Tenants Groups and Community Groups.**
5) **Officers to facilitate, Councillors to lead and Citizens to participate**
6) **Always summarise plenary sessions, report back to meeting, and wash up meeting and then feedback outputs and outcomes to attendees, post to the NBC Website and issue a Press Release to all Media outlets**

Q4) Do you feel that the Neighbourhood Management and Neighbourhood Partnership process engages adequately with all Community Groups?
If not, please give details why.

1) **Neighbourhood Management Area (NMA) Boards**
   Certainly not! They appear to be officer dominated feudal fiefdoms of self appointed, selected and un-elected members of certain but not all Resident Associations that have no democratic mandate that meet in secret in closed meetings to which the residents at large are not invited.
   So much for Community Empowerment and Citizen Participation

   Solution: Directly Elect Resident Representatives every four years to represent suburbs or precincts in the Ward or NMA.
   Invite all residents at large in the NMA. Hold all monthly NMA meetings in Public
   See Bristol's 'Community at Heart' @ http://www.ndcbristol.co.uk/

2) **Neighbourhood Partnership (Forums)**
   Whilst they open to all citizens most do not know where and when they meet, so nobody turns up other than Officers and Councillors who always out number those they are suppose to be serving. Only attended by those in the Know, and the great and the good and informed.

Solution: Distribute Flyers to promote, attract and actually invite all local residents

Q5) In your opinion what Community Groups should the Council be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new communities not currently represented?
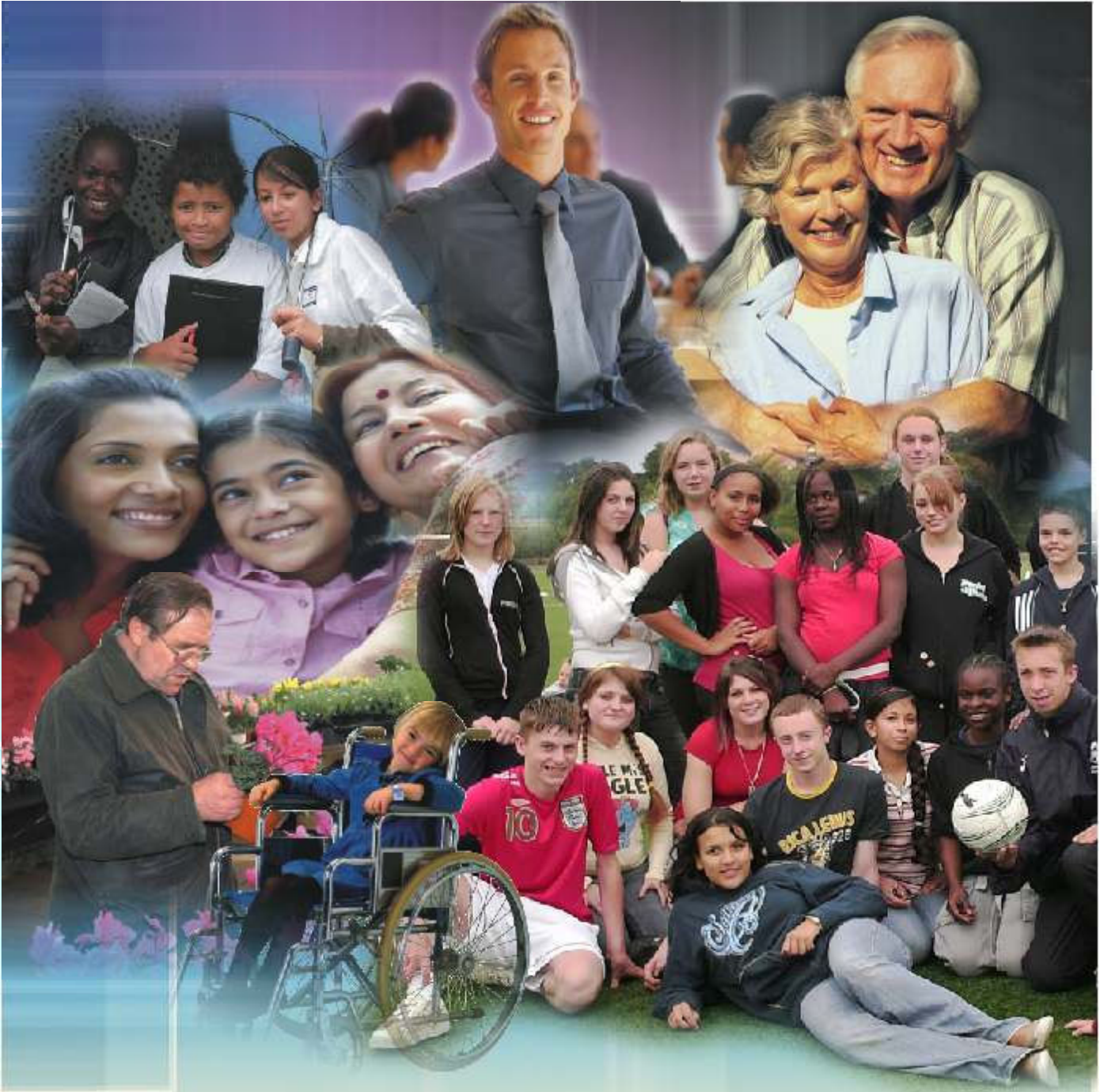
1) Hold a Community Engagement Summit at the Guildhall during Local Democracy Week - Invite the leaders of all Residents Associations, Community, National, Ethnic, Ecumenical, Religious and Faith Groups
2) Locate and Visit all the meetings of all Community Groups

Q6) Any additional information that you feel would inform the review.
Establish New Parish or Community Councils in every Ward incorporating the Neighbourhood Management Areas and Partnerships and all they deliver.

"Participation is the key to Community Harmony"

To make recommendations arising from the review to Cabinet to assist in the budget process and medium term financial strategy for 2008-2011

To review the organisations currently being funded

To review the overall VCS partnership strategy against the national and local situation of funding

NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Voluntary Sector Task and Finish Group

SEPTEMBER 2007

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APPENDICES

Foreword

This Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group comprised of Councillors Joy Capstick, David Palethorpe and Jenny Conroy along with co-opted member Ms Ruth Light of the Northampton Volunteering Centre.

The Group was set up to make recommendations arising from the review to Cabinet to assist in the budget process and medium term funding strategy for 2008-2011. In addition, it was found following a two day CEFAP meeting in March 2007 that a review of the partnership working with the Voluntary Sector should take place prior to funding awards for 2008-2009.

Funding for the voluntary sector organisations has been rolled over in 2007-2008 for the fifth year and a new approach and strategic view needed to be thought out between Northampton Borough Council and the Voluntary Sector.

The review was a short, focussed piece of work that was linked to the Council's corporate priorities and examined a range of information. The Task and Finish Group took evidence from a range of sources and these included witness evidence from the Portfolio Holder (Regeneration, Community Safety, Community Engagement) and from the former Portfolio Holder and CEFAP Chair.

J. Capstick

Councillor Joy Capstick
Chair, Voluntary Sector Task and Finish Group

Acknowledgements to all those who took part in the Review:

- Councillors David Palethorpe who sat with me on this Task and Finish Group. Councillor Palethorpe graciously suggested that I take over as Chair part way through the Review due to his pressing work commitments. His experience, advice and support have been invaluable.
- Councillor Jenny Conroy, whose personal experience of the Voluntary Sector added greatly to our final report.
- Ruth Light, representing the Northampton Volunteering Centre for her breadth of knowledge and experience.
- Councillor Brendan Glynane (Portfolio Holder) for attending a meeting to give evidence and answer questions from the Group to inform the Review.
- 4Robert Goldbourne (Senior Accountant) for his expert contributions to our work and suggestions for our final report.
- Lindsey Cameron (Participation Team Leader) for his commitment in adding valuable advice and suggestions during the process.
- Simone Wade (Policy and Governance Manager) for providing advice and support.
- Tracy Tiff (Scrutiny Officer) for her hard work and professional dedication to this complex piece of work, produced in a very tight time frame.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Task and Finish Group was set up to make recommendations arising from the review to Cabinet to assist in the budget process and medium term financial strategy for 2008-2011.

To review the organisations currently being funded to establish: -

a. Contribution of the organisations to the corporate aims and objectives of Northampton Borough Council.
b. To review and assess the service provision required to be commissioned and therefore to be mainstream funded to meet the aims and corporate objectives of the Northampton Borough Council.
c. To review the applications of currently funded organisations and organisations currently not receiving funding to establish the degree of duplication of services being provided or being offered by the voluntary sector organisations.
d. To review the local service providers currently receiving funding and those local applicants who do not currently receive funding to assess their contribution to neighbourhood community cohesion in accordance with the Northampton Borough Council corporate objectives.

To review the overall Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) partnership strategy against the national situation of funding.

A significant amount of evidence was heard, details of which are contained in the report. After gathering evidence the Task and Finish Group established that: -

Money was vired from the Voluntary Sector Grants `account' to two organisations. The Task and Finish Group acknowledged that this was outside the grants to voluntary sector process. The organisations had addressed Full Council and asked to be considered for funding and had received it. Some letters of complaint had been received about this, challenging the process.

The Task and Finish Group realised that there was a need for a set sum, for example £700,000, to be made available in the budget process for Voluntary Sector grants in order that the Sector is aware of the available fund.

There is need for a longer term strategy regarding funding for vcs organisations which avoids short-term funding agreements and addresses issues such as the possible loss of funds at NBC's annual budget setting rounds.

The future timetable for funding should avoid the situation of voluntary organisations needing to issue redundancy notices because decisions about funding take place too close to the start date for funding.

The Voluntary Sector Post was deleted from the establishment in 2007. The Task and Finish Group acknowledged that there was the need for an Officer to be responsible for the relationship with the Voluntary Sector, and suggested that this should be at Senior Manager level. An Officer should also be responsible for

commissioning services with the Voluntary Sector and the Task and Finish Group felt that this should be at Corporate Director level.

The key elements of a successful council funding programme are: good communication and engagement with the sector; transparency; equality; clarity (including specific priorities for funding); following the Compact between the statutory and voluntary sector (including the funding and procurement code of practice); and a minimum of three-year funding arrangements.

The Task and Finish Group noted a need for an Officer to focus on identifying and securing external sources of funding for NBC and the vcs in partnership with vcs organisations.

This was a short, sharp review carried out over a five-week period and the Task and Finish Group was unable to complete its entire scope. It was realised that there is a need for further work and suggests that the Task and Finish Group be reconvened early next year to carry out further work.

The above overall findings have formed the basis for the following recommendations.

The Task and Finish Group requests that all of the recommendations detailed below are implemented in order that the improvements that this Task and Finish Group seeks can be delivered: The recommendations are in two parts. The first part deals with immediate recommendations and activity, the second part deals with recommendations that require further work but must be completed by June 2008. A clear timetable of this activity will be shared with the vcs as soon as possible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Short Term Recommendations

5.1 **That a Senior Officer, minimum of Corporate Manager level, is explicitly identified as being responsible for the relationship with the Voluntary Sector.**

5.2 **That a minimum of £700,000 is ringfenced in the budget for 2008/2009 for Voluntary Sector grants ahead of the full budget process so that the grant application process can proceed between now and March 2008 £50,000 of this sum be allocated to the Small Grants pot.**

5.3 **That funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector under the Partnership Fund be on a minimum three-yearly basis.**

5.4 **That only Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations should be funded from the Voluntary and Community Sector grants pot.**

5.5 That interim arrangements for those organisations currently funded for one year (to end 31 March 2008) should be put in place and clearly communicated to organisations concerned no later than 30 November 2007.

5.6 That the Administration decides which of the currently funded organisations will be mainstream funded with funding linked to the Corporate objectives and Council departments.

Medium Term Recommendations

5.7 That a feasibility study be carried out to ascertain whether the administrative function for grant applications should be outsourced.

5.8 That the Council develops a Commissioning Strategy for the provision of services to meet the Council's corporate objectives.

5.10 That, given that the entire scope of the review was not fulfilled, the Task and Finish Group be reconvened early next year to carry out further work.

Northampton Borough Council

Overview and Scrutiny

Report of the Voluntary Sector Task and Finish Group

1.   Purpose

1.1   The purpose of the Task and Finish Group was to make recommendations arising from the review to Cabinet to assist in the budget process and medium term financial strategy for 2008-2011.

To review the organisations currently being funded to establish: -

a. Contribution of the organisations to the corporate aims and objectives of Northampton Borough Council.
b. To review and assess the service provision required to be commissioned and therefore to be mainstream funded to meet the aims and corporate objectives of the Northampton Borough Council.
c. To review the applications of currently funded organisations and organisations currently not receiving funding to establish the degree of duplication of services being provided or being offered by the voluntary sector organisations.
d. To review the local service providers currently receiving funding and those local applicants who do not currently receive funding to assess their contribution to neighbourhood community cohesion in accordance with the Northampton Borough Council corporate objectives.

To review the overall Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) partnership strategy against the national situation of funding.

1.2   A copy of the Scope of the Review is attached at Appendix A.

2.   Context and Background

2.1   A Councillor Task and Finish Group was established. One co optee joined the Group, Ms Ruth Light, Northampton Volunteering Centre (NVC).

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

•   Details of the funding round mechanisms currently used
•   List of the Groups currently funded
•   Verbal evidence from internal witnesses
•   Written evidence from users.
•   Best practice external to Northampton
•   Sources of funding/match funding

2.3   This review links to the Council's corporate priorities as it demonstrates listening to local people and providing the services that they need. (Corporate Priority 1 refers).

3.   Evidence Collection

In scoping this review it was decided that evidence would be collected from a variety of sources:

3.1   Expert Witnesses

3.1.1 Core questions were devised and issued to all witnesses providing evidence to the review. A summary of all written responses is detailed below. Copies of all written evidence received is attached at Appendix B. A copy of the core questions is attached at Appendix C.

3.1.2 Key points of evidence: -

- If organisations have similar aims and are not working within a specific community, pooling their resources could be beneficial
- An information pack would help organisations not to feel alone and to feel that they can continue to seek funding from other sources
- The Northampton Volunteering Centre (NVC) is the local infrastructure organisation providing support to frontline VCS groups. A lot of this support is around funding. NVC provides one to one advice on finding funding including Fundfinder sessions using software to help groups identify grant-making trusts. NVC has produced information sources, has web based information and a library of publications available for loan therefore another pack would not necessarily be of use.
- Information packs are only useful if accompanied by some sort of support and guidance, it is easy to send out lists that can be obtained elsewhere anyway, but it is the 'how to' and input from someone that knows the 'scene' that matters.
- Whilst an information pack would not be unhelpful, it would rather miss the point and there may be a better use for these resources elsewhere.
- Any information about other types of funding is useful, but by the time the funding process has taken place and decisions made, it is often too late to apply elsewhere, both in terms of accessing funding streams and also regarding the budget setting and determining the future of affected posts.
- Information packs would be useful for smaller organisations that do have the expertise/resources to undertake this work. I
- It appears that organisations are overly reliant on Northampton Borough Council funding. Whilst it is true that any organisation that receives a significant proportion of its funding from any one funder will be vulnerable should that funding be threatened it is not the case that organisations do not know about potential sources of funding. There are software packages such as 'funder finder' as well as the tailored support available from infrastructure organisations or national bodies.
- What may be a problem for organisations is in successfully bidding for funds. There are two distinct issues that act as barriers to accessing funding. One is the lack of expertise such as writing a successful bid which in itself can be a sophisticated process and managers of small organisations may not have the

skills or at the very least the time to do so. The Authority must accept that Northampton is a relatively prosperous town. In some way it is easier for voluntary organisations to access funding to work in those fields that they often do – community work, regeneration, the relief of poverty and deprivation – where an area shows signs of serious social decline. Much of the need to invest in the voluntary sector in Northampton comes not just from responding to deprivation but as a part of an expansion of mainstream services to meet the needs of a growing town and changing economy.

- Each organisation needs to be funded fairly to its needs and how it contributes to the Council's priorities.
- Grants to the Voluntary Sector is a fair process but there needs to be more support given to the Voluntary Sector.
- The Council has not been found to be proactive in learning about many organisations' work or indeed supporting it. For example, one organisation contributes greatly to community cohesion and health and happy communities but it was felt that this was not taken on board
- CEFAP, together with the voluntary sector officer being present, seems to be quite a rigorous process, but not fair and equitable as there were many organisations that were again 'left out in the cold'.
- There is no communication going on with the voluntary sector at present, which will only lead to more suspicion and a further breakdown in the relationship between them and the Council.
- Compared with other funding processes, the grants to Voluntary Sector process does seem to be fair, however, some other processes use scoring systems that are easily understood and feedback can be given easily about where applications did not meet the criteria or scored less highly than others.
- There is not always good (or any real) feedback about decisions; sometimes several versions about decisions have been given.
- It would be helpful and constructive to have open meetings where officers present their recommendations and decisions are made. This would give real transparency.
- The process of distributing funding may benefit from increased information being made available to the Councillors and possibly through organisational presentations prior to the decision making process
- The current system may contribute to the Council's priorities – it is not however fair and equitable. Aside from those enabled through the Partnership Fund, there is a range of other funding arrangements that have been arrived at either directly between the Council and voluntary sector organisations, or indirectly through the Council's membership of certain partnerships, that may not have been arrived at in a way that was transparent or fair.
- There are services that are currently provided 'in house' that simply cannot be provided as well or as cost effectively as would be the case if provided by the voluntary sector.
- The suggestion of co-opting a representative of the Voluntary Sector to the Task and Finish Group is a step forward towards the Council's support to the Voluntary Sector Infrastructure
- It would be good to have a Council representative attend the Northamptonshire Voluntary and Community Sector Forums
- Unsuccessful organisations should be signposted to other funding streams

- Office accommodation, such as empty offices at Northampton Borough Council could be used for Voluntary Sector organisations
- Hot-desking – allowing groups to share office space and equipment
- The Council could profile voluntary groups for example provide a stand at the Balloon Festival to organisations such as Irish dancers, Indian dancers.
- The Council could give practical support such as opening up its own training more at reduced cost, particularly in relation to management, which the voluntary sector often struggles to resource. Also it could offer access to its own basic Information such as Information Technology (IT) or Health and Safety. Training could be offered at free or reduced cost and offered access to reduced cost hardware such as IT if the Council has bulk contracts.
- A named contact within the Authority whose remit is to link with the voluntary sector is needed. Additionally, an improved communication processes to inform, update and disseminate relevant information and most importantly a longer lead in to the application process.
- The monitoring and evaluation process could focus more on the application and resources of the organisation as to how targets can and are being met
- A less lengthy monitoring could take place in the first quarter of receiving the grant to ascertain whether the organisation has implemented the project, if not, whether the Council would be able to support the organisation on a short-term basis.
- Other organisations, such as the Local Network Fund host a workshop on how to monitor and evaluate. This was found useful by many groups
- The monitoring and evaluation process is vital for both sides.
- It might be helpful, for the Council to nominate individual Councillors to 'sponsor' a voluntary group, whether funded or not, so as to ensure a spread of knowledge about the voluntary sector and individual issues and successes. This would need commitment from Councillors as, where it happens in other areas, often the Councillor contact/attendance either does not happen or drops off.
- Organisations that receive funding are diverse and their resources are vital to the well-being of their clients and to the overall objectives of the Council
- Groups that are "known" to Northampton Borough Council are successful in attracting funding. Officers need to make sure that other groups are not marginalised.
- It is hoped that the Council will continue with some sort of formal structure of engagement with the voluntary sector if it does not continue with CEFAP. Although Northampton Volunteer Centre is highly rated it needs to be far wider than just consulting with them.

3.1.3 Various witnesses were invited to attend a meeting and provide evidence: -

3.1.3.1 Portfolio Holder (Community Engagement and Safety)

The Portfolio Holder (Community Engagement and Safety) attended the meeting on 23 August 2007 (A copy of the minutes of that meeting is attached at Appendix D)

Key points of evidence: -

- An information pack would be useful. It would also be a good idea to signpost unsuccessful organisations to other funding streams.

- Eight years ago the Council had a dedicated External Funding Officer in Post who did research for potential external funding. Such a facility should be in place but if voluntary sector grants were outsourced, there would need to be a Service Level Agreement, and the organisation could be asked to produce such a pack.
- Liverpool City Council receives £9 back for every £1 it grants as funding. Liverpool CC received funding from Agencies and organisations such as the Government Office for the North West (GONW) and Lottery Grants.
- The Council should have an enabling role.
- A new Corporate Plan is being produced which will ensure that it fits in with the Council's priorities.
- A lot of services will fit in with the Council's objectives. Many organisations that the Council funds have services that overlap, an agreement could therefore be made to fund just one of these organisations. There needs to be a proper long term Strategy that states how much funding the Council will make available to the whole Voluntary Sector. For example, informing the Sector of the amount that would be available over the next 3-4 years.
- If the Council was funding the Voluntary Sector it could provide the relevant training to the Sector. However, if grant funding was to be outsourced to another organisation, the Service Level Agreement would ensure that the Sector received proper training.
- By giving the grant in one initial payment rather that in quarterly intervals supports the Voluntary Sector organisations. The organisations then do not have to continually report back to the Council. The Council could support the organisations by liaising with them about their roles and purpose and what impact it has on citizens' lives.
- There is a need to publicise the outcomes and talk about the benefits.
- Should Voluntary Sector grants be outsourced to an organisation such as Northampton Volunteer Centre (on behalf of the Voluntary Sector Forum) or Northants Community Foundation, a lot of the bureaucracy would be cut out and they would be able to bid for large sums of money. There is a need to be mindful that another organisation might be able to facilitate grant funding better than the Council.
- This year's Balloon Festival was part of the learning process. As a suggestion, there could be distinct areas at the Balloon Festival, such as Northampton Celebrates and Voluntary Sector Groups could promote their work in this area.
- The Council needs to be sensitive that such organisations that help vulnerable people are not forgotten.
- Cabinet would be happy to outsource the grant system; a section of the Service Level Agreement would be to signpost applicants to other funding streams.
- Northampton Museum assists individuals and organisations with Lottery bids, for example, a group of youngsters from Spring Boroughs were researching the history of the area and the Museum signposted them to the Lottery Heritage Grant, which they were awarded.

- £2 million of funding is expected for the borough but it is difficult to acquire funding for the Voluntary Sector from the Lottery Funding Community Asset Fund. The deadline for bids for Pathfinder funding is October 2007.
- The Portfolio Holder is not adverse to commissioning services, especially if finance and timesavings are produced. If it can be undertaken better by someone else and still fits in with the Council's priorities, he is open to suggestions.
- Regarding outsourcing the grant funding process, there is a need to get the correct balance. Cabinet would look to the Voluntary Sector and organisations that were noted as best practice and whether it fitted in with the Council's priorities. There would be clear criteria and boundaries.
- There is a need for a very ongoing robust monitoring system: -

    - Administration and the procedure is only a small part of the process.
    - There is a need for the Council to show its commitment.
    - The philosophy and ethos is commissioning services.

3.1.3.6 Previous Chair, CEFAP

The previous Chair, CEFAP attended the meeting on 23 August 2007 to provide details of the process of grant funding to the Voluntary Sector.

The main points of evidence were: -

- The grants to Voluntary Sector process has changed over the past year to include representatives from the Voluntary Sector on the Panel. This was felt to be beneficial in terms of transparency and openness.
- A two-day meeting was held on 14 and 15 March 2007, comprising four elected Members and the Voluntary Sector, investigated the grant funding process.
- It was realised that it was not ideal for the Sector to bid for funding in March they needed the funding earlier in the year.
- The process excluded a number of organisations that could apply for funding through CEFAP.
- The Panel was mindful of the budget 2007 discussions and outcome. For this year £650,000 was available for Voluntary Sector funding which had been cut to £600,00. Prior to the March CEFAP meetings £800,000 funding was received from Central Government as a one off payment. In the light of this Cabinet increased the £600,000 back to the original £650,000 funding figure for the Voluntary Sector. Money was vired from the Voluntary Sector Grants `account' to two organisations (this was outside the grants to voluntary sector process). The organisations had addressed Full Council and asked to be considered for funding and had received it. Some letters of complaint had been received about this, challenging the process.
- CEFAP had decided to look at organisations that the Council currently funds and address these first out of the £650,000 `pot.' There was £30,000 available for small grants. At the end of the process, approximately £580,000 was allocated leaving £67,000 and £27,000 for small grants funding.
- The Sunflower Centre fell out of the criteria for a grant from CEFAP and the Panel addressed this with the Council's Chief Executive. The Chief Executive has delegated powers regarding funding and finance up to the value of

£50,000. The Sunflower Centre needed £40,000 and this sum was vired from the Voluntary Sector funding `account' with the intention to vire it back into the account at a later date.

- The grants to Voluntary Sector process is in place to enable organisations to bid for funding. It is apparent that for some organisations that bid for funding, the Council should be commissioning their services, for example it could state that it cannot deliver that service itself but could commission the organisation to do it. Funding for vulnerable people should not come out of the Voluntary Sector `pot'. How the Council supports such organisations and individuals needs investigating, for example, the provision of tools, training etc
- Northampton Borough Council has representatives on the Supporting People Board.
- There is a need for a manager at senior level to have responsibility for the relationship with the Voluntary Sector.
- The Voluntary Sector Post was deleted from the establishment earlier this year and the Post cannot be re-introduced.
- There needs to be a new approach and strategic vision how the grants process will be managed with the Voluntary Sector
- Three year Service Level Agreements with the Voluntary Sector finished in 2004 and were carried forward for 2005, 2006, and 2007.
- The Voluntary Sector needs to be informed of the Council's priorities.
- There is a need to be prescriptive about tailoring resources to priorities and how the Council's support to the Voluntary Sector is changed.
- There needs to be a set amount, for example £700,000, to be made available in the budget process for Voluntary Sector grants.

3.2   Policy and Governance Manager

3.2.1 The Policy and Governance Manager provided baseline data on:-

Background to the Grant Funding Process to the Voluntary Sector

Funding for Voluntary Sector organisations has been rolled over in 2007-2008 for the fifth year without a full review being carried out during this time.

The inclusion of Voluntary sector representation on the CEFAP has made the process more open and transparent, however there continues to be concerns on how individual organisations are chosen to receive grants and how the eservices they provide contribute to the Corporate Objectives of Northampton Borough Council.

It was agreed at the CEFAP meeting held on the 14th March 2007 that a review of the partnership working with the voluntary sector should take place prior to the award of funding for the period 2008 - 2009 and beyond.

Protocol

To produce a questionnaire based on the current application form for all currently funded organisations and applicants who are not currently funded to establish services provided and/or offered.

Interview currently funded organisations.

13

Interview organisations/applicants for funding not currently receiving funding.

Interview Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) staff and Councillors to establish detailed information on NCC strategy and funding policy

Interview Northampton Borough Council staff and Councillors.

Resources

In respect of officer involvement, the post of Voluntary Sector Support Officer has recently been deleted as part of the recent efficiency savings.

3.2   Scrutiny Officer

3.2.1 The Scrutiny Officer provided baseline information on: -

Northamptonshire County Council's Funding to the Voluntary Sector process

Strategic Funding Programme is the largest of the grants programme and is for revenue core funding (£1.5m 2007-08).

There is one round per year. There is no upper limit on the amount that can be awarded, however it is not expected that more than 50% of the organisations costs would be funded. Cover core costs such as: salaries of key workers, administration, training, maintenance, insurance and rent costs. Funding agreements can range from 1 – 3 years. Applications are required and activity for which funding is required is expected to contribute to the Council's and Local Area Agreement (LAA) priorities. Applications are scored by Officers and recommendations are presented to the Community Funding Advisory Panel and Cabinet Sub-Committee for consideration and endorsement. Payments for grants of over £5,000 are made in two instalments; 60% on receipt of signed agreement and 40% after interim monitoring.

Capital Funding Programme £500,000 per annum

Rural and Urban regeneration capital projects (including compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act). Regeneration and provision of community spaces. Two rounds in a year, decisions in April and October, match funding expected (can include In-kind contributions). Up to 50% of total cost (Maximum award £50,000). Applications are required and activity for which funding is required is expected to contribute to the Council's and funding programme priorities. Applications are scored by a scoring panel and recommendations are presented to the Community Funding Advisory Panel and Cabinet Sub-Committee for consideration and endorsement. Payments are made on receipt of invoices. The project visited prior to commencement of work and after completion.

Youth Small Grants Project £300,000 per annum

Grants are available from £2,500 to £5,000 for start-up money to support projects to stimulate and encourage new youth work activity. There are currently two

rounds per annum, but it is planned to move to quarterly rounds. Applications are required and activity for which funding is required is expected to contribute to the Council's and funding programme priorities, including supporting one or more of the 5 outcomes of the Children and Young People Services Children Act.

Payment is made in full on receipt of signed agreement. Applications will be considered by a Panel that reports to the Community Funding Advisory Panel and Cabinet Sub-Committee.

Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Investment £410,000p.a.

This is conducted through a tendering process and current contracts, which commenced in September 2006, are in place for 3 years. The Youth Infrastructure Contract, which commenced in April 2007, is also for 3 years. Payments are made in two instalments; 50% on receipt of signed agreement (successful annual review in subsequent years) and 50% after mid-interim monitoring.

Details Required from Applicants

All successful applicants are expected to provide governance and policy documents (e.g. organisation's memorandum and articles of association, signed constitution or set of rules, equal opportunities, health and safety, insurance policies etc). They should also where possible provide evidence of need for the activity for which funding is required (in the case of the grants programmes). Capital applicants are also required to provide details of planning and other permissions (where appropriate) and quotations. Funded organisations will undergo monitoring according to performance indicators set in the schedules of the funding agreements.

NCC does not have a pack signposting organisations to alternative funding streams, however, in its communications with the VCS, it provides contact details for the local infrastructure organisations (LIO) and advises unsuccessful and all other applicants to contact their LIO for advice and support on securing other sources of funding and also for other related support. . Electronic links can be accessed from the Council's website. In addition to directing applicants to LIOs, the Council also has the GrantNet grant database facility that can be accessed by the public. This facility enables it to undertake their own search for funding.

3.3   Senior Accountant

The Senior Accountant provided information on: -

Service Budgets and Voluntary Organisations Fit

Details of service budgets and Voluntary Organisations fit are attached at Appendix E.

Community Enabling Fund – Criteria for 2007/2008

Details of the Community Enabling Fund – Criteria for 2007/2008 are attached at Appendix F.

Small Grants Funding

There is no funding in the current year to run the small grants funding programme. However in 2006-07 the budgets were as follows:

Service	£
Arts	6,940
Community	12,480
Sports	5,390
Total	24,810

The Sunflower Centre

There is currently no authorisation to pay the Sunflower Centre. The Council is aiming to mainstream this organisation, which will in time become part of the Community Safety Team's budget. The funding of £40,000 still needs to be identified in order to pay the grant to the Sunflower Centre.

3.4   Senior Estates Officer

The Senior Estates Officer provided details on the Council's support when leasing buildings and its policy on income on such leases. A copy of the Council's Lettings and Disposals Protocol is attached at Appendix G which describes the process that " *enables the Council to let its properties on the basis of commercial and professional good practice, in away that contributes positively to the aspirations set out in the Community Strategy but which can also respond appropriately to specific factors affecting partners and the not-for-profit sector* ".

3.4   Co-Opted Member to the Task and Finish Group

The co-opted member provided information about Northampton Volunteering Centre and the Northampton Voluntary and Community Sector Forum, which brings together over 160 local voluntary and community sector organisations.

Evidence from Northampton Voluntary and Community Sector Forum

Key points of evidence: -

- The Voluntary and Community Sector plays a very significant role in delivering services for people in Northampton and much can be gained by working in partnership.
- The Forum strives to improve the partnership working and understanding between the voluntary and community sector and its statutory partners, and in the light of the recent policy decisions by NBC, the Forum would like to contribute to an improved strategy for funding the work of the sector. This can help avoid some of the issues experienced recently in connection with the launch of the Partnership Fund and proposals to abolish community grants.
- Forum members feel that the recent launch of the Partnership Fund

demonstrated a lack of a partnership approach because there was a lack consultation with the Forum about the funding programme and therefore a lack of transparency to the process. The Forum elected representatives to the Borough Council CEFAP and Small Grants Panels in August 2006 and the Forum made repeated requests for information about plans for strategic funding for months before the launch of the Partnership Fund. Better communication and dialogue would have avoided some of the issues regarding the fund, which have emerged since its launch.

- The Forum believes that the Council has shown a lack of clarity of vision for the future of funding for key services provided by voluntary sector organisations, and despite undertaking the CLEARreview, NBC does not seem to be any clearer in identifying its key priorities for funding despite the Partnership Fund aligning objectives with the LAA and Corporate Plan.
- The VCS is innovative and adaptive and organisations would welcome the opportunity to be involved in work to enable NBC to deliver its services in new and more effective ways. Some individual organisations have been involved in discussion of commissioned work but this has not been progressed by NBC.
- There is a major issue regarding timing of the decision making process regarding the Partnership Fund which is leading to uncertainty which makes effective planning extremely difficult for organisations. The decisions about funding will not be known until late March meaning that organisations have already had to serve redundancy notices on staff both creating additional work for organisations and making it likely that staff will leave before the decisions are known.

The aims of the Northampton Voluntary and Community Sector Forum are attached at Appendix H.

Northampton Volunteering Centre – Support Services for Voluntary Organisations and Community Groups in Northampton

Northampton Volunteering Centre (NVC) is the local infrastructure agency providing support to frontline voluntary and community groups in Northampton has expertise gained through many years of working with the voluntary sector. NVC operated as a volunteer bureau for 15 years and has undertaken a range of project work including a 2 1/2 year project supporting voluntary and community groups in the town centre wards. NV holds a contract for this work with Northamptonshire county Council and is funded by NBC.

Services

It provides: access to user-friendly information; and a range of one off and ongoing support for voluntary and community organisations on a range of subjects, including:

- Funding sources
- Planning
- Management committees
- Developing a constitution
- Charity registration
- Personnel issues

- Legal issues
- Starting a new group
- Publicity/marketing
- Quality standards
- Working with volunteers
- Finding volunteers

Membership

Northampton Volunteering Centre is a membership organisation. Membership is free. Its services for Voluntary and Community Organisations are provided to three levels:

v Level 1 = basic information including information sheets and resource lists
v Level 2 = use of resources, one to one support through an advice session, meeting, telephone or email etc.
v Level 3 = more protracted or in depth work

In order to access level 2 or 3 services VCS asks voluntary/community organisations to become a member of Northampton Volunteering Centre.
.
Advice leaflets are provided, an example of which is attached at Appendix I.

3.4 **Participation Team Leader**

The Participation Team Leader provided details on Organisations currently funded by NBC and details of organisations unsuccessful in the funding round to the meeting that was held on 13 August 2007 (A copy of the minutes of that meeting are attached at Appendix G).

Organisations passing the initial assessment and considered for funding by Northampton Borough Council (2007/2010)

> Ability Northants
> Age Concern Northampton and County
> Care and Repair
> Doddridge Centre
> Dostiyo
> Manna House
> NCDA
> Nene Valley Christian Family Refuge
> Northampton CAB
> Northampton Door to Door Service
> Northampton Hope Centre
> Northampton Volunteering Centre (Age Span)
> Northampton Volunteering Centre LIO Function
> Northampton Women's Aid
> Northamptonshire Autistic Society
> Northamptonshire Race Equality Council
> Northamptonshire Rape and Incest Crisis Centre
> Northamptonshire YMCA
> Patel Somaj of Northampton

Prince's Trust
Relate Northamptonshire
Spurgeons
Victim Support Northamptonshire
Welfare Rights Advice Service
YWCA

Applications deemed to have failed the initial assessment against the essential criteria and a brief summary as to the reason for failure.

Converge Learning Consortium	Only twelve of the eighteen essential criteria satisfied
Cruse Bereavement Care	Only fourteen of the eighteen essential criteria satisfied
Kings Heath Adventure Club	Only twelve of the eighteen essential criteria satisfied
Need To Know Shop	Only five of the eighteen essential criteria satisfied
Sunflower Centre	Not a registered/unregistered Charity, Voluntary or Community Group, or Social Enterprise. Therefore not eligible to apply to the Partnership Fund
Thorplands and Thorplands Brook Community Cooperative	Only five of the eighteen essential criteria satisfied

Each organisation above was contacted in writing with a full and detailed explanation of the reasons as to why the application failed.

3.4 **Looking at Best Practice and other Local Authorities**

3.4.1 **Local Authorities**

3.4.1.1 Desktop research was carried out with a number of Local Authorities and other organisations regarding their community engagement processes.

3.4.1.2 The following Local Authorities were contacted:

- Gloucester City Council
- Leicestershire County Council
- Newcastle City Council
- Nottinghamshire County Council
- Reading Borough Council
- Torridge District Council
- Liverpool City Council
- London Borough of Camden
- Manchester City Council
- London Borough of Newham

- London Borough of Barnett

3.4.1.3   Other information was obtained via the Internet and the Audit Commission's website.

3.4.1.4   The Organisation, Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE), was also requested to provide information, details of which are contained in the main body of this briefing note. APSE sent a global email to all of its members asking for information on their funding process, in particular around a pack signposting unsuccessful applicants to other funding sources.

3.4.1.5   The East Midlands Funders Forum was contacted and asked which Local Authorities grant funding process was noted as best practice. Leicestershire County Council's was commended as an excellent example of best practice.

3.4.1.6   In addition the following Charities were contacted, or their websites looked at, to find out what their funding process was and how they signposted unsuccessful applicants to other funding streams:

- National Lottery (Big Lottery Fund)
- The Big Boost (part of the Big Lottery Fund)
- Comic Relief
- The Arts Council

The Big Boost Programme

The Big Boost programme is run by Un Ltd, Scarman Trust, The Prince's Trust and Changemakers. The programme is funded by Big Lottery Fund and is part of their Young People's Fund initiative. The Big Boost gives awards to young people of between £250 and £1000 (11-16) and £500 and £5000 (16-25), to help them get their ideas off the ground.Applicants are asked to complete a questionnaire in quiz format to find out if they are eligible for a grant. The website contains a Frequently Asked Questions page. There are no details signposting unsuccessful applicants to other funding streams.

Arts Council, England

The Arts Council funds arts activities that benefit people in England, or that help artists and arts organisations. It regularly funds over 1,100 arts organisations on a three-year basis, investing around £400 million in these organisations in 2006/07. The Arts Council has standard conditions for grants, which set out important parts of the relationship between the Arts Council and the recipients of the Arts Council's grant funding. The conditions apply to every grant given by the Arts Council, and applicants are advised that they should be read along with other documents that set out the responsibilities of grant recipients. There are no details of where unsuccessful applicants can apply for alternative funding.

National Lottery Funding

The National Lottery Funding Process is very complex and there are separate categories of funding dependent upon for example the type of grant, the amount requested. On its website, National Lottery Funding has help sheets which detail the information that applicants must submit with their National Lottery Funding application. The website gives information of where alternative funding can be sought. It has listed a range of funding organisations and information resources for applicants on where to go for further help. The list of funding organisations is not exhaustive. It states that there are many government schemes, trusts and foundations that provide funding for specific causes. Applicants are also advised to always check with the relevant local body, for example their local authority about current grant schemes. The information resources include a selection of national second-tier agencies and helper organisations that may be able to give applicants detailed advice on how to make an application to Lottery funders. These organisations may also give applicants advice on planning a project or running an organisation. The website details a list of organisations that the National Lottery suggests to unsuccessful applicants to contact for alternative funding streams.

Audit Commission

After perusing the Audit Commission's website, in particular the Comprehensive Assessment Performance (CPA) page, no Local Authorities were recognised from their CPA reports as being good or excellent for their grant funding process. The majority of specific reviews into this topic found the Local Authority being investigated as poor.

However, the Audit Commission has published a recent report on commissioning public services from the voluntary sector. The report examines commissioning and procurement practices amongst local Councils and calls for an intelligent approach to commissioning which involves the sector in designing as well as delivering services.

Government has been pushing an agenda to encourage a significant increase in commissioning from the voluntary sector. The Audit Commission research found that:

- Many smaller voluntary organisations were unable or unwilling to compete for contracts.
- Capacity-building programmes had not had a significant local impact.
- There is little evidence (in part due to problems of data collection) that voluntary sector providers offered, at either a national or local level, improved performance or value for money compared to the public or private sectors.

The Audit Commission is keen to see the Voluntary Sector overcome these barriers by:

- contributing to national training programmes for third sector commissioning;
- continuing to assess councils' commissioning as part of the use of resources element of CPA;

- for the future, how councils and their partners work with the voluntary sector, in the Commission's development of Comprehensive Area Assessment.

The key recommendation contained in the report focuses on what the Audit Commission describe as 'Intelligent commissioning' and 'effective procurement'. This, it argues, is likely to be a more effective framework for voluntary organisations to prosper than one which gives them 'special treatment': 'not least because the sector has not demonstrated that it has inherent advantages that warrant such special treatment'. The report is aimed primarily at managers in local Councils who are responsible for commissioning services; but it is described as being of interest to 'voluntary organisations that are seeking to influence and deliver public services, as well as national policy makers'.

Leicestershire County Council

The East Midlands Funders Forum recognises the Leicestershire Compact as an example of best practice. A Compact is a partnership agreement between voluntary and community organisations and the statutory agencies they work with. It sets out a framework for relations and identifies principles to adopt when working together. the Leicestershire County Compact has been drawn up between the voluntary and community Sector in Leicestershire and Leicestershire County Council and serves as a template for the CVS to refer to when writing their own version. It also helps voluntary organisations that operate across numerous districts and need to relate directly with Leicestershire County Council.

The Leicestershire County Compact was publicly signed on the 13th August 2004 at an official launch. The Compact document provides a guide on the way that the County Council and the Voluntary and Community Sector in Leicestershire work together. It explains that there can be different kinds of relationship with partners, or none at all but there may be times when a relationship needs to be formed with either the County Council or a Voluntary and Community organisation and this should be done based on sufficient knowledge of that organisation and its practices.

Gloucester City Council

The Council signposts all groups, successful or unsuccessful, to local infrastructure organisations that can offer specialist-funding advice. It also offers them other support and guidance from its own Community Development team.

Gloucester City Council's grant funding is managed centrally. It is a transparent process and written grant assessments are shared with applications prior to any decision being taken. Standard terms and conditions are used to promoted good practice and Officers support organisations to meet these.   A new process is being introduced that will offer grant-funded groups three –year agreement linked to service level agreements. This gives more opportunity to fund specific time limited activities on a one off basis. A single application form and simpler monitoring process has been introduced. Both commissioned services and grant-funded projects will be resourced on a full cost recovery basis.

3.3   Newcastle City Council

Newcastle City Council has three types of grant funding: -

- Strategic – a contribution to core funding strategically important organisations
- Project – For one-off pieces of work or pilot initiatives for a fixed period of time
- Development – investment in the capacity of voluntary or community groups

The Council has a three-year funding programme, with service level agreements for those who have funding agreed for that period. The move to three year funding has meant less flexibility in the mainstream grants budget but the small grants and externally funded grants pots allow for greater flexibility to fund new and innovative projects. The Council has a good record for developing funding to help organisations delivery strategically important niche services to develop internal procedures and good practice.

The Council has a common application form and standard agreement for grant funding. All funding opportunities are published on the Council's website.

3.4   Reading Borough Council

The Council has a clear application process and regular cycle for its grant programmes. Monitoring is proportionate to the amount of funding granted. Those with grant funding of more than £10,000 have negotiated service level agreements which follow a standard format and increase in complexity proportionate to the amount of funding. Should organisations not be offered funding they may be offered `in kind' support or help from the External Funding Team. The Local Authority administers all its own grant distribution.

3.5   Manchester City Council

The Council provides a range of different funding programmes to the voluntary and community sector, ranging from very small start-up schemes to high-value multi-year agreements, all of which have their own criteria and monitoring frameworks.

Across various departments, the City Council has longstanding funding, service delivery, and partnership relationships with many of the estimated 1,500 active voluntary and community groups in Manchester.

In 1992, the City Council established the Voluntary Sector Policy and Grants Section (VSPG) to rationalise and co-ordinate the City Council's non-contractual funding to voluntary groups, and to improve grants monitoring systems and practice. To achieve this objective, many of the historically funded groups and associated departmental budgets were transferred from departmental responsibility to VSPG. The section sits within the Regeneration Division of the Chief Executive's department, and currently oversees a central revenue-funding budget in excess of £4.8m, which supports 97 organisations working in a range of service areas. In addition, for the last 4 years, £500,000 has been made available through VSPG for the CAS:H (Clean and Safe) small capital grants scheme, which aims to help improve community safety through local environmental projects. A small grants programme is also available, mainly to support the development of groups at local community/neighbourhood level.

Government has provided substantial funding for the establishment of a Community Network for Manchester, to link together the different parts of the voluntary and community sector, and develop mechanisms to enable the sector to become involved in decision making structures in the City, including the Manchester LSP. The Network

will be responsible for nominating voluntary and community sector representatives to the LSP bodies and for enabling two-way communication between the sector and the Partnership.

London Borough of Barnett

The London Borough of Barnett has been awarded Beacon status for its Voluntary Sector Funding. The Beacon Scheme identifies excellence and innovation in Local Government. The scheme exists to share good practice so that 'best value' authorities can learn from each other and deliver high quality services to all. There are two forms that are sent out to applicants for funding, one for requests over £5,000 and the other under that sum. Guidance notes are similar, although the Council tries to make it a bit simpler for smaller requests. All applications up to £20,000 are dealt with under delegated powers to the Cabinet Member for Community Services. Above this level they go to Cabinet and Cabinet Resources Committees. Most groups receiving over £50,000 have moved into a contract.

The Council does not have a pack to sign post to other sources of funding, although it administers one large local charity which may be appropriate for anyone it is unable to help. Otherwise it funds a post at Barnet Voluntary Service Council, Funding Advice Officer, who picks up most of this work.

London Borough of Newham

The Council is currently going through its own transition from grant funding to a commissioning process. It has consulted with the Third Sector and is now just developing the process.

With regards to sign posting the Council works in partnership with GRANTnet to help community and voluntary groups obtain up-to-date information on funding and grants free of charge. The Council also offers support to organisations to complete funding applications.

GRANTnet, is a straightforward free-to-use service from GRANTfinder. It can help small businesses to identify suitable funding. Information on over 4,000 grants and other incentives is rapidly identified by answering a few simple questions about the activity applicants wish to undertake and the type of funding required. There are several steps and, at each step, a Help screen assists the applicant in completing the required information. The system is updated regularly to ensure access to the very latest funding information and includes funds from Europe, the UK Government and local authorities. GRANTnet also provides a link to experts from Business Links in England, Scottish Enterprise, Invest Northern Ireland, Business Eye Wales and the European Information Centres (EICs) in the UK - so once an organisation has been identified a grant, it can get advice on submitting an application. The web address for GRANTnet is www.grantnet.com.

The London Borough of Newham has a small grants programme that encourages residents to form informal community groups that deliver innovative activities that encourage community cohesion specifically within diverse groups. The grant funding section of its website contains comprehensive information, together with guidance notes and a frequently asked questions page.

4.   Conclusions

After all of the evidence was collated the following conclusions were drawn:

4.1   Money was vired from the Voluntary Sector Grants `account' to two organisations. The Task and Finish Group acknowledged that this was outside the grants to voluntary sector process. The organisations had addressed Full Council and asked to be considered for funding and had received it. Some letters of complaint had been received about this, challenging the process.

4.2   The Task and Finish Group realised that there was a need for a set sum, for example £700,000, to be made available in the budget process for Voluntary Sector grants in order that the Sector is aware of the available fund.

4.3   There is need for a longer term strategy regarding funding for vcs organisations which avoids short-term funding agreements and addresses issues such as the possible loss of funds at NBC's annual budget setting rounds.

4.4   The future timetable for funding should avoid the situation of voluntary organisations needing to issue redundancy notices because decisions about funding take place too close to the start date for funding.

4.5   The Voluntary Sector Post was deleted from the establishment in 2007. The Task and Finish Group acknowledged that there was the need for an Officer to be responsible for the relationship with the Voluntary Sector, and suggested that this should be at Senior Manager level. An Officer should also be responsible for commissioning services with the Voluntary Sector and the Task and Finish Group felt that this should be at Corporate Director level.

4.6   The key elements of a successful council funding programme are: good communication and engagement with the sector; transparency; equality; clarity (including specific priorities for funding); following the Compact between the statutory and voluntary sector (including the funding and procurement code of practice); and a minimum of three-year funding arrangements.

4.7   The Task and Finish Group noted a need for an Officer to focus on identifying and securing external sources of funding for NBC and the vcs in partnership with vcs organisations.

4.8   This was a short, sharp review carried out over a five-week period and the Task and Finish Group was unable to complete its entire scope. It was realised that there is a need for further work and suggests that the Task and Finish Group be reconvened early next year to carry out further work.

5. Recommendations

The Task and Finish Group requests that all of the recommendations detailed below are implemented in order that the improvements that this Task and Finish Group seeks can be delivered: The recommendations are in two parts. The first part deals with immediate recommendations and activity, the second part deals with recommendations that require further work but must be completed by June 2008. A clear timetable of this activity will be shared with the vcs as soon as possible.

Short Term Recommendations

5.1   That a Senior Officer, minimum of Corporate Manager level, is explicitly identified as being responsible for the relationship with the Voluntary Sector.

5.2   That a minimum of £700,000 is ringfenced in the budget for 2008/2009 for Voluntary Sector grants ahead of the full budget process so that the grant application process can proceed between now and March 2008 £50,000 of this sum be allocated to the Small Grants pot.

5.3   That funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector under the Partnership Fund be on a minimum three-yearly basis.

5.4   That only Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations should be funded from the Voluntary and Community Sector grants pot.

5.5   That interim arrangements for those organisations currently funded for one year (to end 31 March 2008) should be put in place and clearly communicated to organisations concerned no later than 30 November 2007.

5.6   That the Administration decides which of the currently funded organisations will be mainstream funded with funding linked to the Corporate objectives and Council departments.

Medium Term Recommendations

5.7   That a feasibility study be carried out to ascertain whether the administrative function for grant applications should be outsourced.

5.8   That the Council develops a Commissioning Strategy for the provision of services to meet the Council's corporate objectives.

5.10   That, given that the entire scope of the review was not fulfilled, the Task and Finish Group be reconvened early next year to carry out further work.

Appendices

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

**PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR/
FUNDING FOR VOLUNTARY SECTOR
TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

1. Purpose/Objectives of the Review

To make recommendations arising from the review to Cabinet to assist in the budget process and medium term financial strategy for 2008-2011.

To review the organisations currently being funded to establish:-

     a. Contribution of the organisations to the corporate aims and objectives of Northampton Borough Council.

     b. To review and assess the service provision required to be commissioned and therefore to be mainstream funded to meet the aims and corporate objectives of the Northampton Borough Council.

     c. To review the applications of currently funded organisations and organisations currently not receiving funding to establish the degree of duplication of services being provided or being offered by the voluntary sector organisations.

     d. To review the local service providers currently receiving funding and those local applicants who do not currently receive funding to assess their contribution to neighbourhood community cohesion in accordance with the NBC corporate objectives.

To review the overall VCS partnership strategy against the national situation of funding.

2. Outcomes Required

- To identify resources available to provide support to organisations awarded grants, including the monitoring and evaluation process.

- To identify a process of distributing funding to the Voluntary Sector in a fair and equitable way that contributes to the Council's priorities.

- To identify how the Council supports the Voluntary Sector infrastructure so that the organisations become fit for purpose.

3. Information Required

- Details of the funding round mechanisms currently used
- List of the Groups currently funded
- Verbal evidence from employees, Portfolio Holder, Chair of CEFAP

- Written evidence from users.
- Best practice Councils
- Sources of funding/match funding

4. Format of Information

- Officer reports/presentations
- Baseline data
- Best practice external to Northampton
- Witness interviews/evidence
- Portfolio Holder evidence
- Chair of CEFAP evidence
- Evidence from S Gooding, NCC
- Employee Evidence

5. Methods Used to Gather Information

- Minutes of the meetings
- Desktop research
- Examples of best practice
- Witness Interviews/evidence: -
  - o Users of the service
  - o Portfolio Holder
  - o Chair of CEFAP
  - o S Gooding, NCC
  - o R Golbourne, Senior Accountant, NBC

6. Co-Options to the Review Committee

Suggested co-optee – Ann Gilbert – to represent the Voluntary Sector.

7. Evidence gathering Timetable

July – September 2007

30 July	Scoping the review
August	Evidence gathering
September	Finalise Chair's report

8. Responsible Officers

Lead Officer	Simone Wade
Co-ordinator	Tracy Tiff

9. **Resources and Budget**

Simone Wade, Policy and Governance Manager, to provide support and advice.

10 **Final report presented by:**

Completed by September 2007. Presented by the Chair of the Task and Finish Group to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 and then to Cabinet.

11 **Monitoring procedure:**

To review the impact of the report after six months (March 2008).

Hi Tracy

Sorry this is very last minute but this is my response to the 5 questions which I hope will be useful

1. 1. **signposting pack** – these are only useful if accompanied by some sort of support and guidance, it is easy to send out list which can be obtained elsewhere anyway, but it's the 'how to' and input from someone that knows the 'scene' that matters.

2. 2. **current process** – in my narrow experience of being a CFAP member earlier this year together with the NBC voluntary sector officer being present it seemed to be quite a rigorous process, but I would not say it was fair and equitable as there were many organisations that were again 'left out in the cold'. Work was going to start on looking at duplication of services – what happened to this? There is also no communication going on with the voluntary sector at present which will only lead to more suspicion and a further breakdown in the relationship between them and NBC. Consultation with them is crucial, look at what happened at the end of last year (2006) when the then current administration threatened to pull all the voluntary sector grant money or at best half the grants. This caused much stress and anxiety to the very people we serve, our service users.

3. 3. **support for the voluntary sector** – crucial that you have a named voluntary sector officer, (or similar) how can you provide support without someone taking on that responsibility and rebuilding relationships, damaged or otherwise?

4. 4. **support for organisations awarded grants** – I have no problem with the monitoring and evaluation process, this is vital for both sides but again I refer to my comments in 3. Again it is vital to have a named person you can build up a relationship and understanding with, they then can inform Council and give there judgement and opinions.

5. 5. **further comments –** I hope NBC will continue with some sort of formal structure of engagement with the voluntary sector if they do not continue with CFAP. Although I rate Northampton Volunteer Centre highly it needs to be far wider than just consulting with them.

I am on leave now until 28th August so I hope this makes sense!

Kind regards,

Sandra Bell
Director
Ability Northants
13 Hazelwood Road
Northampton NN1 1LG
Tel: 01604 624088

Overview and Scrutiny Voluntary Sector Task and Finish Group

Background

Northampton and District Citizens Advice Bureau is part of a national network of CAB services. It is an independent charity and draws funding from both local authorities and other sources such as Barclaycard, HMRC, and also The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (Citizens Advice). In 2007/8 we expect to help 4,500 people, with 6000 enquiries and in this process deal with 11,000 issues. We are one of the most improved Citizens Advice Bureau in the region in terms of Quality of Advice and now offer access through face to face, letter and Email. We are in the final planning stages, and the lead bureau, of a County Wide partnership of Citizens Advice Bureaux aiming to provide enhanced access to telephone advice through the creation of a Virtual Call Centre and other channels of access. We currently support over 50 volunteers in a range of capacities.

Core Questions

Alternative Funding Streams Pack

The premise of this appears to be that organisations are overly reliant on NBC funding. Whilst it is true that any organisation that receives a significant proportion of its funding from any one funder will be vulnerable should that funding be threatened it is not, in our view, the case that organisations do not know about potential sources of funding. There are software packages such as 'funder finder' as well as the tailored support available from infrastructure organisations or national bodies. What may be more of a problem for organisations is in successfully bidding for funds. In this respect there are two distinct issues we believe act as barriers to accessing funding. These are, firstly lack of expertise. Writing a successful bid is a sophisticated process and managers of small organisations may not have the skills or at the very least the time to do so. Secondly, the Authority must accept that Northampton is a relatively prosperous town. In some way it is easier for voluntary organisations to access funding to work in those fields that they often do – community work, regeneration, the relief of poverty and deprivation – where an area shows signs of serious social decline. Much of the need to invest in the voluntary sector in Northampton comes not just from responding to deprivation but as a part of an expansion of mainstream services to meet the needs of a growing town and changing economy. In summary then, whilst a pack as suggested would not be unhelpful, it would rather miss the point and there may be a better use for these resources elsewhere.

Fairness of distributing funding to the voluntary sector.

The current system may, in a round about way contribute to the Council's priorities – it is not however fair and equitable. Aside from those enabled through the Partnership Fund, there are a range of other funding arrangements that have been arrived at either directly between the council and voluntary sector organisations, or indirectly through the council's membership of certain partnerships, that may not have been arrived at in a way that was transparent or fair. These all need to be scrutinised to determine:

- The manner in which these arrangements were originally made
- Whether these arrangements do actually contribute to the overall objectives of Council or whether they were made simply based on officer preference
- Whether there are other providers who would service the authority more effectively.

In other words, to place the same disciplines of accountability, on all funding relationships, that exist as a result of those relationships created through Partnership Fund decisions.

Equally well, there are services that are currently provided 'in house' that simply cannot be provided as well or as cost effectively as would be the case if provided by the voluntary sector.

Support to the Voluntary Sector

The CAB service is well supported by its national association in a range of areas such as fundraising, IT, training and the like. Thinking carefully about the needs of smaller organisations or those not enjoying the same level of central support it would be our view that supporting infrastructure to place an enhanced focus on fundraising would be helpful although this would need to be a little more considered than producing a pack.

Support to organisations awarded grants

We would actually value a more robust monitoring and evaluation process – simply to demonstrate the improvements in performance we have made over the last 2 years.

Martin Lord
Manager
Northampton and District CAB
01604 628152
manager.northamptoncab@cabnet.org.uk

(1).

Overview and Scrutiny Voluntary Sector Task and Finish Group.

- Do you feel that a Pack signposting unsuccessful organisation to other funding streams would be useful?

Yes, it would help organisations not to feel alone and not to feel that they can no longer continue to seek funding from other sources.

- In your opinion do you feel that the current process of distributing funding to the Voluntary Sector is a fair and equitable procedure that contributes to the Councils Priorities.

I do feel that they are fair, however I do feel that they need to listen more and support the Voluntary Sector more. I also feel that they

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(2).

should still be fair to everyone who puts their bids in.

- Can you suggest ways that the Council there could support the Voluntary Sector Infrastructure so that the organisation become fit for purpose.

To be helpful fair and to listen in order for them to become fit for purpose and if not to signpost them to other funding so that they then don't feel left out or feel that they cannot continue. This could hopefully then encourage them to become fit for purpose.

- How do you feel the council could provide support to organisations awarded grants including the monitoring and evaluation process?

③

When the grants been awarded to the voluntary sector they should inform them about there voluntary work and how they have been getting on so that they can monitor there service in-order to have a good case for next years award process.

Response from Irish Community (Small Grants)

****Do you feel that a pack signposting unsuccessful organisations to other funding streams would be useful?**

We already have the use of the Volunteer Centre and their Funder-Finding workshops. I am attending one of these in the near future.
We also know how to research funding streams via the internet.
To have another pack would not necessarily be of use.

****In your opinion do your feel that the current process of distributing funding to the VS is fair and equitable procedure that contributes to the councils** infrastructure?

No – not in our case. It may partly be our own fault, but we have not found NBC to be proactive in learning about our work or indeed supporting it. Our organisation contributes greatly to community cohesion and healthy and happy communities, but we do not feel that this is taken on board.

****Can you suggest ways that the Council could support support the Voluntary Sector infrastructure?**

Short answer – money!
Long answer -
Office accommodation – empty offices at NBC buildings could be used.
Hot-desking – allowing groups to share office space/equipment.

Our organisation is funded by the Irish Government for staff wages and some projects, but we desperately need a home.
OR
Council could profile our groups/use us at events and activities – for instance – give a stage at the balloon Festival to Irish dancers – Indian dancers etc…. have ethnic sports groups playing games – kabadi (wrong spelling!!) and Gaelic Football?
OR
Ask us to be more involved with your groups – for instance your sports development people.

<u>How do you feel the Council could provide support to organisation awarded grants, including the monitoring and evaluation process?</u>

We are adept at sticking to evaluation procedures – but that is because I worked on the side of giving money before – and understand what to do.

Other organisations such as the Local Network Fund give a workshop on how to monitor and give evaluation. We found this very basic when we went, however other groups do find it useful.

<u>Any further information you may wish to include.</u>

It has appeared to us that groups who are "known" to NBC are successful in attracting funding. Officers need to make sure that other groups are not being marginalised. Many groups do good work, but may not "profile" themselves as well as others.

9th August, 2007

Dear Councillor Capstick,

<u>Overview and Scrutiny Voluntary Sector Task and Finish Group</u>

With reference to your letter dated 6th August, 2007 regarding the above and the questions which were detailed in your letter.

I would like to make the following comments to the points in question.

- It is difficult to ascertain whether signposting unsuccessful organisations to other funding streams would be useful when not knowing which organisations are unsuccessful.
  I would say though that if the aims are similar and the organisation is not working within a specific community then pooling their resources could be beneficial.

- Again without the information of what funding is given to which organisation it is difficult to form an opinion.
  Each organisation needs to be funded fairly to its needs and how it contributes to the Council's priorities. There should also be some leeway to those organisations who perhaps do not, or cannot, work within the Council's priorities, but whose aims are to benefit the needs of their clients in a more holistic approach.

- I think by the suggestion of co-opting a representative of the Voluntary Sector to the Review Committee is a step forward toward the Council's support to the Voluntary Sector infrastructure. A further step would be for a representative of the Council to be made available to be present at the Northamptonshire Voluntary and Community Sector Forums. Not only within an official capacity but by being present on a non-official capacity which would draw an even working partnership.

- Once an organisation has been awarded the funding on the basis of their application, then the monitoring and evaluation process could take more consideration of the application and resources of the organisation as to how targets can and are being met.
  It may be that Council resources will not be able to meet this suggestion, but perhaps a less lengthy monitoring could take place in the first quarter of receiving the grant to ascertain whether the organisation has implemented the project, and if not, whether the Council would be able to support the organisation on a short term basis in whatever way would be suitable.

- Looking at the names of those organisations who do receive funding from the Council I can see how diverse they all are and how vital their resources are to the well-being of their clients and to the overall objectives of the Council.

I hope these comments are of some help and if you would like to discuss any points further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

<u>Community House Manager</u>

Councillor Joy Capstick
Interim Chair,
Overview and Scrutiny Voluntary Sector Task and Finish Group
Northampton Borough Council
The Guildhall
St Giles Square
Northampton.
NN1 1WJ.

Response from Nene Valley Christian Refuge

Point 1 - Yes I do feel that a sign posting pack to other funding streams would be useful

Point 2 - Is the distribution process of funding a fair and equitable procedure? I am not sure - the process is quite arduous and the effort   r   required can be disproportionate to the amount for money possibly granted. Small organisations may not have the skills or expertise   to make applications, and even medium sized ones like ourselves are sometimes challenged. This year there did seem to be some   discrepancy in the monitoring requirements as some organisations had agreed a detailed SLA and targets before the decision was   made just to go ahead and sign the SLA without a meeting to discuss targets - so there was no consistency in the requirements for   different organizations. The language used is not always user friendly and could therfore be disadvantageous to less 'professional'   groups.

Point 3 - Ensuring ongoing funding is available for those organizations who can provide the infrastructure

Point 4 - Some continuity between NCC and NBC in terms of applications, monitoring requirements would be helpfull - replicating the same or   similar information for more than one funder is time consuming and not good use of staff resources. Is there a way that information   could be passed between NBC and NCC (with our permission), this saving paper and time for us?
       - More practical in kind support would also be helpful - this may already be available, but the Voluntary Sector are not always aware of   the nature of support available - a list of the range of specific areas of support available would be helpful.
       - NBC staff who have 'on the ground' knowledge or experience of the voluntary sector wound be helpful - not just experience of working   at an executive level within the VCS, but some understanding of the nature and scope of the work undertaken and the challenges   faced on a day to day basis
       - a commitment to at least 3 year funding agreements. Every application requires a considerable amount of time in preparation - this is   not good use of resources
       - a demonstration from NBC that consideration has been given to the bigger picture and to the repercussions of cuts.
       - a more joined up appraoch within NBC to supporting the VCS - and a clear communication to the VCS of how this is happening

Hope this is helpful

Jacqui Johnson
Project Manager
Nene Valley Christian Family Refuge

Our response to the core questions posed in your mailing of 6th August 2007.

❖ ❖ **Do you feel that a pack signposting unsuccessful organisations to other funding streams would be useful?**

> Yes – especially for smaller organisations who do have the expertise/resources to undertake this work. In addition advice, guidance and support in the preparation of applications to funding bodies would be very beneficial.

❖ ❖ **In your opinion do you feel that the current process of distributing funding to the voluntary sector is a fair and equitable procedure that contributes to the Council's priorities?**

> We feel that the process of distributing funding may benefit from increased information being made available to the Councillors and possibly through organisational presentations prior to the decision making process.

❖ ❖ **Can you suggest ways that the Council could support the Voluntary Sector infrastructure?**

> A named contact within the authority whose remit is to link with the voluntary sector. Additionally improved communication processes to inform, update and disseminate relevant information and most importantly a longer lead in to the application process.

❖ ❖ **How do you feel the Council could provide support to organisations awarded grants, including the monitoring and evaluation process?**

> Appreciation of the partnership working practices with voluntary agencies in fulfilling the Council's objectives.

Peggy Shilson
Chief Executive Officer
Northampton Women's Aid
PO Box 315
Northampton NN1 1LS

Tel: 0845 123 2311
Email: peggy@northamptonwomensaid.org.uk

Witness Core Questions

- Do you feel that a pack signposting unsuccessful organisations to other funding streams would be useful?
- In your opinion do you feel that the current process of distributing funding to the Voluntary Sector is a fair and equitable procedure that contributes to the Council's priorities?
- Can you suggest ways that the Council could support the Voluntary Sector infrastructure?
- How do you feel the Council could provide support to organisations awarded grants, including the monitoring and evaluation process?
- Any further information you may wish to include.

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
VOLUNTARY SECTOR TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

Monday, 13 August 2007

PRESENT:

Councillor Joy Capstick	- Chair
Councillor Jenny Conroy	
Ruth Light, NVC,	- Co-Opted Member

Lindsey Cameron	- Participation Team Leader
Robert Golbourne	- Senior Accountant
Tracy Tiff	- Scrutiny Officer

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Palethorpe and Councillor Simpson (Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1).

In the absence of Councillor Palethorpe, Councillor Capstick was elected Interim Chair for this meeting.

The Chair welcomed Ruth Light, co-opted member, representing the Voluntary Sector, to the meeting.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 30 JULY 2007

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2007 were agreed as a true record.

3 TO APPROVE THE SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

The Task and Finish Group approved the Scope of the Review, as amended. Copy attached at Annex 1 to the minutes.

The Group discussed the current position regarding Voluntary Sector Funding: -

- The Council recently deleted the Voluntary Sector Support Officer Post from the establishment. There is a need to arrange who will deal with this work. Currently no designated Officer has sole responsibility for this work.
- Up until approximately eight years ago the Council had a dedicated External Funding Officer in Post, whose main job was to seek out external local, regional, national and European funding that the Council could utilise. Potentially the borough could be missing out from Government projects such as Pathfinder.
- The Northampton Volunteering Centre uses the Community Grant Finder

computer package and has a number of grant programmes that it funds in Northampton

- It was suggested that the local PCT be contacted to find out its funding arrangements
- Voluntary Groups would welcome an enhanced feedback process
- It could be beneficial for Borough Councillors to visit certain voluntary organisations once a year or `adopt' an organisation as part of a monitoring process. The views of Councillors should be sought to see if this would be a valuable tool in the monitoring process and as a means for elected Members to aid feedback from the Voluntary Sector
- The current monitoring process is proportionate to funding allocated
- Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) has a heavy monitoring process
- Community Groups, in particular those that are small, not well established, lack a proper infrastructure and do not have the correct accounts in place to apply for a grant, need support. An informal arrangement is in place between NBC and Northampton Volunteering Centre (NVC) regarding liaison with the Voluntary Sector to provide help to small groups
- There is a need for unsuccessful applicants to be given both general and generic advice, and in some instances specific tailor made advice, or a pack signposting them to alternative funding sources
- Northampton Volunteering Centre (NVC) has a comprehensive website which does include details of alternative funding streams. There is a need for a Funding Strategy and it was noted to implement such a document would take time
- It would be useful to ascertain from organisations/groups funded from the Partnership Fund, the percentage of NBC funding that attributes to their organisation
- The current infrastructure is that NBC funds NVC to provide support to Voluntary Organisations. NVC supported 152 organisations of varying size last year. NVC is often the organisations first port of call. R Light emphasised that there is a need for more investment in NVC's services
- There is a need to find out NCC's funding mechanisms and monitoring process. The Scrutiny Officer undertook to contact NCC to ask whether this information could be provided
- It was suggested that it might be beneficial for the forthcoming year for the historical funding process to be continued and then with Cabinet's approval a new improved funding process be introduced

4 WITNESS EVIDENCE

(A) ROBERT GOLBOURNE, SENIOR ACCOUNTANT, NBC

Robert Golbourne, Senior Accountant, NCC provided a schedule setting out the criteria that all Voluntary Sector and Community Groups are assessed by when applying for funding. A copy is attached at Annex 2.

It was noted that for all voluntary organisations and community groups: -

- There is a regular assessment process
- All funding monies were paid quarterly up to March 2007 when it has

subsequently been agreed by Accounting Services that awards to Partnership funded organisation can be paid as a single annual payment

The Group commented, asked questions and heard: -

- If an annual payment was made it was felt this could hinder the monitoring process
- The newly implemented criteria for the Partnership Fund caused concern amongst some Voluntary Sector Organisations
- The CEFAP process is very good, it now has representatives from the Voluntary Sector sitting on it, which has opened up the process making it more transparent
- Funding up to £500 is delegated to one NBC Officer and two Voluntary Sector representatives for recommendation to the Chief Executive for decision; however, CEFAP is always informed of the decision made. The Group felt this was a good, accessible system
- Funding for small grants needs to be clearly and widely advertised, and should contain a helpline number. There is also the need for an Officer to check applications to ensure that they have been correctly completed
- Regarding the Partnership Fund, there is a need for some of the decisions to be made at service level, as this is currently no such link. For example, housing and homeless issues, funding is made available by NBC to the Sunflower Centre and the Hope Centre, if this was linked to Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) it is possible that NBC service departments could provide more funding to those groups that assist with the delivery of services
- Regarding joint working between NBC and Voluntary Sector, the Group heard that CAB and Welfare Rights liaise closely and there is scope for joint working. Mixed provision is a more comfortable process with the Voluntary Sector. There is a need to identify where current organisations fit into service budgets. **R Goulbourne would provide this information to the next meeting**
- The total paid to Volunteer Assistants, i.e. representatives from Age Concern, Scouts Disability Organisations etc., was £5,000 for last year. It is a model of good practice for payment to be made to such representatives, and helps to make the process more transparent.
- There is a need to find out where the amount available (£27,000) for small grants funding is. **R Goulbourne to provide this information to the next meeting**
- In response to a query regarding the Council's funding of £40,000 for the Sunflower Centre, the Group heard that the Sunflower Centre is a multi agency partnership. NBC had forwarded £40,000 to the Sunflower Centre until this finance was available from another funding pot. **R Goulbourne undertook to provide comprehensive detail on this issue to the next meeting**

(B)   PREVIOUS CHAIR - CEFAP

Consideration of this item was deferred to the next meeting.

(C)   WRITTEN EVIDENCE RECEIVED SO FAR

Written evidence received so far was noted.

Officer would produce a summary of the main points made by responders.

5 OFFICERS' REPORTS

The Group noted the list of organisations that had been successful and unsuccessful in the last funding round. R Light, co-opted member circulated further details for the Group's consideration.

6 SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

The schedule of meetings was noted: -

Thursday 23 August – Evidence gathering
Tuesday 4 September – Finalise Chair's report

All meetings would be held at the Guildhall and would commence at 5pm
The meeting concluded at 7:10 pm

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

**PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR/
FUNDING FOR VOLUNTARY SECTOR
TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

1. Purpose/Objectives of the Review

To make recommendations arising from the review to Cabinet to assist in the budget process and medium term financial strategy for 2008-2011.

To review the organisations currently being funded to establish:-

   a. Contribution of the organisations to the corporate aims and objectives of Northampton Borough Council.
   b. To review and assess the service provision required to be commissioned and therefore to be mainstream funded to meet the aims and corporate objectives of the Northampton Borough Council.
   c. To review the currently funded organisations and organisations currently not receiving funding to establish the degree of duplication of services being provided or being offered by the voluntary sector organisations.
   d. To review the local service providers currently receiving funding and those who do not currently receive funding to assess their contribution to neighbourhood community cohesion in accordance with the NBC corporate objectives.

To review the overall VCS partnership strategy against the national and local situation of funding.

2. Outcomes Required

- To identify resources available to provide support to organisations awarded grants, including the monitoring and evaluation process, which should be proportionate to the amount of funding.

- To identify a process of distributing funding to the Voluntary Sector in a fair and equitable way that contributes to the Council's priorities.

- To identify how the Council supports the Voluntary Sector support services so that the organisations become fit for purpose.

3. Information Required

- Details of the funding round mechanisms currently used
- List of the Groups currently funded
- Verbal evidence from employees, Portfolio Holder, Chair of CEFAP
- Written evidence from users.
- Best practice Councils
- Sources of funding/match funding

4. Format of Information

- Officer reports/presentations
- Baseline data
- Best practice external to Northampton
- Witness interviews/evidence
- Portfolio Holder evidence
- Chair of CEFAP evidence
- Evidence from S Gooding, NCC
- Employee Evidence

5. Methods Used to Gather Information

- Minutes of the meetings
- Desktop research
- Examples of best practice
- Witness Interviews/evidence: -
  - Users of the service
  - Portfolio Holder
  - Chair of CEFAP
  - S Gooding, NCC
  - R Golbourne, Senior Accountant, NBC

6. Co-Options to the Review Committee

Ruth Light – to represent the Voluntary Sector.

7. Evidence gathering Timetable

July – September 2007

30 July   Scoping the review

August   Evidence gathering

September   Finalise Chair's report

8. Responsible Officers

Lead Officer   Simone Wade
Co-ordinator   Tracy Tiff

9. Resources and Budget

Simone Wade, Policy and Governance Manager, to provide support and advice.

10 Final report presented by:

Completed by September 2007. Presented by the Chair of the Task and Finish Group to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 and then to Cabinet.

11 Monitoring procedure:

To review the impact of the report after six months (March 2008).

Northampton Borough Council
Overview and Scrutiny
Voluntary Sector Task and Finish Group
Monday 13 August 2007 at 5:00 pm in the Holding Room at the Guildhall

<u>Community Enabling Fund - Funding Criteria for 2007/2008</u>

Set out below is process for assessing applications for funding

Initial Assessment

Criteria	Up to £500	£500 to £5,000	£5,000 and above
Must be based in Northampton	✓	✓	✓
Have a Board of Trustees or Management Committee (3 min)	✓	✓	✓
Be a registered Charity, an unregistered Voluntary or Community Group or registered charitable company limited by guarantee, Social Enterprise	✓	✓	✓
Project / activity must support one or more of the aims of The Corporate Plan	✓	✓	✓

Have the following documents

	Up to £500	£500 to £5,000	£5,000 and above
Completed and signed application form	✓	✓	✓
Articles of Association / Constitution	✓	✓	✓
Set of Accounts and /or Annual Report (not more than 12 months old)	✓	✓	✓
Equal Opportunities Policy	✓	✓	✓
Bank or Building Society Account (requiring 2 signatories – must not be related)	✓	✓	✓
Insurance where applicable	✓	✓	✓
Certificates of Employer and Third Party Liability Insurance	✗	✓	✓
Staff and Volunteer recruitment and retention policies	✗	✗	✓
Staff and Volunteer training and development policies	✗	✗	✓
Complaints procedures / policy	✓	✓	✓

Monitoring and Evaluation

	Up to £500	£500 to £5,000	£5,000 and above
Simple Monitoring form	✓	✗	✗
Monitoring form	✗	✓	✗
Service Level s Agreement	✗	✗	✓
Monitoring and Evaluation	✓	✓	✓

Northampton Borough Council
Overview and Scrutiny
Voluntary Sector Task and Finish Group
Monday 13 August 2007 at 5:00 pm in the Holding Room at the Guildhall

Matched funding is required on a pound for pound basis for bids between £2,500 and £5,000.

<u>**Ineligible for funding**</u>

Criteria	Budgets		
	Up to £500	£500 to £5,000	£5,000 and above
Not based in Northampton	✓	✓	✓
Second request for funding within a 12 month period	✓	✓	✓
Application from other Statutory Bodies	✓	✓	✓
Capital expenditure – such as building materials and / or refurbishment	✓	✓	✓
Transport	✓	✓	✓
Refreshments	✓	✓	✓
Activities of a political nature			
Individual beneficiary	✓	✓	✓
Private (for profit) activity / business	✓	✓	✓
Retrospective Activities	✓	✓	✓
Failure to provide information by the deadline	✓	✓	✓

✓ = Applies
✗ = Does <u>not</u> apply

<u>**Awards Process**</u>

The decision-making; is made in partners with representatives from Northampton's Voluntary Sector Forum, the Director on Northampton Volunteer Centre and NBC officers. Awards of funding support Corporate and Local Area Agreement priorities

Up to £500 – Small Grants Panel Decision, signed of by Chief Executive, and reported to CEFAP

Between £500 and £5,000 – Small Grants Panel Recommendations to CEFAP. CEFAP recommendations to Chief Executive, signed of by Chief Executive.

There are no 'Small Grants' programmes in 2007-08.

£5,000 and above (The Partnership Fund) – Grants Panel Recommendations to CEFAP. CEFAP recommendations to Chief Executive, signed of by Chief Executive.

Payment is made either by cheque or directly to the organisations bank accounts once there is a signed agreement. This does not apply to the Partnership Fund.

Northampton Borough Council
Overview and Scrutiny
Voluntary Sector Task and Finish Group
Thursday 23 August 2007 at 5:00 pm in the Holding Room at the Guildhall

Appendix E

Organisation	Grant 2007-2008	Service	Corporate Plan	LAA	Inclusion
Ability Northants	31,350		✓	✓	✓
Care and Repair	28,000	Housing	✓	✓	✓
Dostiyo	6,500		✓	✓	✓
Manna House	14,000		✓	✓	✓
Nene Valley Christian Family Refuge	10,000	Housing	✓	✓	✓
Northampton CAB	91,911	Housing	✓	✓	✓
Northampton Door to Door Service	70,389		✓	✓	✓
Northampton Hope Centre	15,000	Housing	✓	✓	✓
Northampton Volunteering Centre	45,000		✓	✓	✓
Northampton Women's Aid	40,000	Housing	✓	✓	✓
Northamptonshire Race Equality Council	21,000		✓	✓	✓
Northamptonshire Rape and Incest Crisis Centre	30,000		✓	✓	✓
Relate Northamptonshire	10,000		✓	✓	✓
Victim Support Northamptonshire	22,000		✓	✓	✓
Welfare Rights Advice Service	110,000	Housing	✓	✓	✓
Total	**545,150**				

Northampton Borough Council
Overview and Scrutiny
Voluntary Sector Task and Finish Group
Thursday 23 August 2007 at 5:00 pm in the Holding Room at the Guildhall

Organisation	Grant 2007-2008	Service	Corporate Plan	LAA	Inclusion
Light House Mission	500	Arts	✓	✓	✓
Northamptonshire Society For Autism	250		✓	✓	✓
Indian Hindu Welfare Organisation	1,926	Arts	✓	✓	✓
Somali Health Awareness Foundation	1,264		✓	✓	✓
Northampton Irish Support Group	1,424		✓	✓	✓
Anjuman Ghulam-E-Hazrat Abbas	1,000		✓	✓	✓
Total	**6,363**				

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Staff and Volunteer recruitment and retention policies	✗	✗	✓
Staff and Volunteer training and development policies	✗	✗	✓
Complaints procedures / policy	✓	✓	✓

Monitoring and Evaluation

	Up to £500	£500 to £5,000	£5,000 and above
Simple Monitoring form	✓	✗	✗
Monitoring form	✗	✓	✗
Service Level s Agreement	✗	✗	✓
Monitoring and Evaluation	✓	✓	✓

Matched funding is required on a pound for pound basis for bids between £2,500 and £5,000.

<u>**Ineligible for funding**</u>

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		Budgets	
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Payment is made either by cheque or directly to the organisations bank accounts once there is a signed agreement. This does not apply to the Partnership Fund.

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
VOLUNTARY SECTOR TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

Thursday, 23 August 2007

Councillor Joy Capstick   Chair
Councillor Jenny Conroy
Councillor David Palethorpe
Ruth Light   Co-Opted Member

Simone Wade   Policy and Governance Manager
Tracy Tiff   Scrutiny Officer

Councillor Brendan Glynane Portfolio Holder for item 3(A)

1 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Simpson, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 AUGUST 2007

Subject to the following amendment:-

The Northampton Volunteering Centre uses **Funder Finder ……** and provides support around access …

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 August 2007 were agreed.

3 WITNESS EVIDENCE

(A)   PORTFOLIO HOLDER - COUNCILLOR BRENDAN GLYNANE

Councillor Brendan Glynane, Portfolio Holder, provided a response to the Group's core questions: -

Do you feel that a pack signposting unsuccessful organisations to other funding streams would be useful?
Yes a pack would be useful. It would also be a good idea to signpost unsuccessful organisations to other funding streams.

Eight years ago the Council had a dedicated External Funding Officer in Post who did research for potential external funding. Such a facility should be in place but if voluntary sector grants were outsourced, there would need to be a service level agreement, and the organisation could be asked to produce such a pack.

Liverpool City Council receives £9 back for every £1 it grants as funding. Liverpool CC received funding from Agencies and organisations such as the Government Office for the North West (GONW) and Lottery Grants.

The Council' should have an enabling role.

In your opinion do you feel that the current process of distributing funding to the Voluntary Sector is a fair and equitable procedure that contributes to the Council's priorities?
I am unsure whether the current Council's priorities fit in with the Voluntary Sector. However, a new Corporate Plan is being produced which will ensure that it fits in with the Council's priorities.

A lot of services will fit in with the Council's objectives. Many organisations that the Council funds have purposes that overlap, an agreement could therefore be made to fund just one of these organisations. There needs to be a proper long term Strategy that states how much funding the Council will make available to the whole Voluntary Sector. For example, informing the Sector of the amount that would be available over the next 3-4 years.

Can you suggest ways that the Council could support the Voluntary Sector infrastructure so that the organisations become fit for purpose?
If the Council was funding the Voluntary Sector it could provide the relevant training to the Sector. However, if grant funding was to be outsourced to another organisation, the Service Level Agreement would ensure that the Sector received proper training.

How do you feel the Council could provide support to organisations awarded grants, including the monitoring and evaluation process?
By giving the grant in one initial payment rather that in quarterly intervals. The organisations then do not have to continually report back to the Council. The Council could support the organisations by liaising with them about their roles and purpose and what impact it has on citizens' lives.

There is a need to publicise the outcomes and talk about the benefits.

Any further information
Should Voluntary Sector grants be outsourced to an organisation such as Northampton Volunteer Centre (on behalf of the Voluntary Sector Forum) or Northants Community Foundation, a lot of the bureaucracy would be cut out and they would be able to bid for large sums of money. There is a need to be mindful that another organisation might be able to facilitate grant funding better than the Council.

The Group asked Councillor Glynane supplementary questions: -

Is it possible that more support could be given to Community Groups hosting stands at the Balloon Festival?
This year's Balloon Festival was part of the learning process. Entrance to the Northampton Show was free only for the first three years. As a suggestion, there could be distinct areas at the Balloon Festival, such as Northampton Celebrates and Voluntary Sector Groups could promote their work in this area.

What is your view on mainstream organisations? I.e. organisations that clearly delivery services outside the Voluntary Sector, for example to vulnerable people?
The Council needs to be sensitive that such organisations are not forgotten.

Why does the Council not have an External Funding Officer?
The Council has been under pressure answering to Central Government therefore there has not been the Officer time to prepare a Strategy for external funding. It is acknowledged that the Council has missed out on many funding opportunities. There would be a need to have an individual who is good at researching for external funding.

Is it your priority that there is funding for such a Post?
Cabinet would be happy to outsource the grant system; a section of the Service Level Agreement would be to signpost applicants to other funding streams.

The Museum assists individuals and organisations with Lottery bids, for example, a group of youngsters from Spring Boroughs were researching the history of the area and the Museum signposted them to the Lottery Heritage Grant, which they were awarded.

Councillor Glynane advised that £2 million of funding is expected for the borough but it is difficult to acquire funding for the Voluntary Sector from the Lottery Funding Community Asset Fund. The deadline for bids is October 2007 for Pathfinder funding.

What are your thoughts on different types of funding for the future that other Local Authorities have?
I am not adverse to commissioning services, especially if finance and timesavings are produced. If it can be undertaken better by someone else and still fits in with the Council's priorities, I am open to suggestions.

Outsourcing the grant funding process is supported by the Voluntary Sector, but it could be seen as passing over the responsibility and ensuring proper transparency in the process?
There is a need to get the correct balance. Cabinet would look to the Voluntary Sector and organisations that were noted as best practice and whether it fitted in with the Council's priorities. There would be clear criterion and boundaries.

There is a need for a very ongoing robust monitoring system.
Administration and the procedure is only a small part of the process.
There is a need for the Council to show its commitment.
The philosophy and ethos is commissioning services.

Councillor Glynane was thanked for his address.

(B)   PREVIOUS CHAIR OF CEFAP - COUNCILLOR DAVID PALETHORPE

Councillor Palethorpe advised that he was the previous Chair of CEFAP, as he had been the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Community Safety and the Voluntary

Sector.

He advised on the grant funding process:-

The process had changed over the past year to include representatives from the Voluntary Sector on the Panel. This was felt to be beneficial in terms of transparency and openness.

A two-day meeting was held during March 2007, comprising Councillor Palethorpe, three other elected Members and the Voluntary Sector, investigating the grant funding process. It was realised that it was not ideal for the Sector to bid for funding in March they needed the funding earlier. The process excluded a number of organisations that could apply for funding through CEFAP. The Panel was also mindful of the budget 2007 discussions and outcome. For this year £650,000 was available for Voluntary Sector funding which had been cut to £600,00. Prior to the March CEFAP meetings £800,000 funding was received from Central Government as a one off payment. In the light of this Cabinet increased the £600,000 back to the original £650,000 funding figure for the Voluntary Sector. Money was vired from the Voluntary Sector Grants `account' to Need to Know and Thorpelands Community Centre prior to the CEFAP meeting this year (this was outside the grants to voluntary sector process). The Organisations had addressed Full Council and asked to be considered for funding and had received it. Some letters of complaint had been received about this, challenging the process.

CEFAP had therefore decided to look at organisations that the Council currently funds and address these first out of the £650,000 `pot.' There was £30,000 available for small grants. At the end of the process, approximately £580,000 was allocated leaving £67,000 and £27,000 for small grants funding.

The Sunflower Centre fell out of the criteria for a grant from CEFAP and the Panel addressed this with the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive has delegated powers regarding funding and finance up to the value of £50,000. The Sunflower Centre needed £40,000 and this sum was vired from the Voluntary Sector funding `account' with the intention to vire it back into the account at a later date. Councillor Palethorpe had assumed that the £40,000 had already been vired back into the Voluntary Sector `account' Therefore a total amount of £640,000 had been allocated for funding including small grants. S Wade confirmed that liaisons would take place with the accountants as to the situation and the Group would be notified accordingly.

Councillor Palethorpe confirmed that the process that is in place enables organisations to bid for funding. It is apparent that for some organisations that bid for funding, that the Council should be commissioning their services, for example it could state that it cannot deliver that service itself but could commission the organisation to do it. He gave an example of an organisation that CEFAP would not fund – a voluntary gardening service.

The Group asked supplementary questions and heard:-

- Funding for vulnerable people should not come out of the Voluntary Sector `pot'. How the Council supports such organisations and individuals needs investigating, for example the provision of tools, training etc. The gardening project referred to above would link to Supporting People.
- NBC has representatives on the Supporting People Board.
- There is a need for a manager at Senior level to have responsibility for the relationship with the Voluntary Sector.
- It was emphasised that the Voluntary Sector Post had been deleted from the establishment earlier this year and the Post could not be re-introduced
- The work the Voluntary Sector Officer undertook is being picked up by the Team
- There needs to be a new approach and strategic vision how the grants process will be managed with the Voluntary Sector
- Three year Service Level Agreements with the Voluntary Sector finished in 2004 and were carried forward for 2005, 2006, and 2007.
- The Voluntary Sector needs to be informed of the Council's priorities.
- There is a need to be prescriptive about tailoring resources to priorities and how the Council's support to the Voluntary Sector is changed.
- There needs to be a set amount, for example £700,000, to be made available in the budget process for Voluntary Sector grants.

A potential recommendation for the final report was suggested – The grants funding process should be amended to include a section to prevent organisations from asking Full Council for grant funding, which is outside the CEFAP procedure to obtain grants.

A potential recommendation for the final report – That a senior officer, minimum of Corporate Manager level, is responsible for the relationship with the Voluntary Sector. Commissioning must be at Corporate Director level.

A potential recommendation for the final report – That Cabinet be requested to include a minimum of £700,000 in the budget for 2008/2009 for Voluntary Sector grants.

4 WITNESS EVIDENCE - WRITTEN EVIDENCE

The Task and Finish Group noted the further written evidence. This information would be appended to the report.

6 SUMMARY OF WITNESS EVIDENCE

The Task and Finish Group received a summary of all witness evidence received.

7 WRITTEN EVIDENCE FROM NORTHAMPTON VOLUNTEER CENTRE RUTH LIGHT

The Task and Finish Group noted the written evidence received from R Light, Co-Optee. This information would help inform the final report.

8 WRITTEN EVIDENCE FROM ASSET MANAGEMENT

The Senior Estates Officer provided written evidence detailing the Council's Letting

and Disposals Protocol. This information was duly noted.

9 OFFICERS REPORTS

The Task and Finish Group noted reports on:-

- Service budgets and voluntary organisation fit
- Small grants funding
- £40,000 funding for the Sunflower Centre
- NCC's grant funding process

10 RESULTS OF DESKTOP RESEARCH (INFORMATION TO FOLLOW)

The Task and Finish Group received the Scrutiny Officer's report detailing the results of desktop research. This information would be included in the Chair's final report.

11 DATE OF FINAL MEETING

The final meeting was noted as Tuesday 4 September 2007 commencing at 5pm.

The meeting concluded at 7:05 pm

Northampton Voluntary and Community Sector Forum

Aims

The Forum was established in March 2004, after pilot work and research. It enables groups/organisations from all parts of the Northampton voluntary and community sector to come together and have a voice. It provides three important things:

1.   A channel for communication between the voluntary sector and statutory organisations, making it easy for statutory agencies to consult and for voluntary/community organisations to feed in their views and collectively respond to important consultations

2.   Democratically elected representation from the sector to a range of multi-agency groups and committees (eg the Local Strategic Partnership), which discuss issues and make decisions impacting on the voluntary/community sector and the users and members of voluntary and community organisations. Importantly the Forum offers a route for Representatives to feedback to the Forum membership and be open to contact from Forum members about issues they are concerned about and would like to see raised.

3.   The opportunity for networking and exchange of information between voluntary organisations and statutory partners. The emphasis is on easy to digest information relevant to voluntary organizations' needs.

The Forum has been having quarterly meetings and a Forum newsletter is produced in between meetings along with other briefings and updates.

Membership

Membership of the Northampton Voluntary and Community Sector Forum is free and open to all Voluntary and Community Sector organisations operating in Northampton.

There are currently 160 member organisations. Forum members come from a broad range of organisations from very small new groups, community organisations, to large voluntary organisations working in Northampton and beyond. Groups may focus on a particular client group or activity.

Steering Group

A Steering Group elected from the membership oversees the activity and development to of the Forum. This group meets 4 times a year and is responsible for the Forum's Terms of Reference and direction.

Role of NVC

The Forum is facilitated by Northampton Volunteering Centre (NVC). This involves:

- admin support - including maintaining the membership database organising and minuting meetings and distributing information.
- development support – such as working with other agencies on possible consultations, promoting the Forum and developing forum representation
- information services – including identifying and synthesising relevant information, writing the newsletter and other information briefings

Achievements

The Forum has enabled members to develop a voice and to participate in national and local consultations such as local planning about health services; the Borough Council's review of funding to the voluntary sector and currently we are working with the new West Northamptonshire Development Corporation to ensure that the voluntary sector can have a significant input into the growth plans for Northampton.

Membership of the Forum has grown steadily and engagement with Forum activities has also increased.

The Forum has followed the development of the LAA and the work of the West Northants Development Corporation.

The Forum has elected a number of representatives to different partnership including the LSP, Compact Steering group. LAA VCS task Group, LAA avoidable injury group and Town Centre Commission.

The Forum engaged in dialogue with Northampton Borough Council about change to its funding programme for voluntary and community organisations. This resulted in representatives places being created on NBC's two funding panels.

Forum meetings have covered a range of different topics and promoted dialogue and increased understanding.

A number of members have commented that the Forum helps to make them feel less isolated.

Where the forum fits

The idea for a forum came about a few years ago following a consultation exercise by CVS Northants. This produced a model for local fora in all of the districts in Northamptonshire, which would feed into a countywide forum, with the flexibility for countywide theme based groups.

In 2003 there was no forum In Northampton giving the voluntary sector a voice. Therefore NVC obtained initial SRB6 funding and subsequent funding from Northampton Borough Council and Northampton PCT to develop a forum, which is for and run by voluntary sector organisations.

Similar fora have been established in other Northamptonshire Districts. There is currently no countywide voluntary and community sector forum, although options for its development are being explored.

about NVC

Northampton Volunteering Centre has expertise gained through many years of working with the voluntary sector. NVC operated as a volunteer bureau for 15 years and has undertaken a range of project work including a 2 ½ year project supporting voluntary and community groups in the town centre wards.

Membership

Northampton Volunteering Centre is a membership organisation.

Our services for voluntary and community organisations are provided to three levels:

❖ Level 1 = basic information including information sheets and resource lists

❖ Level 2 = use of resources, one to one support through an advice session, meeting, telephone or email etc.

❖ Level 3 = more protracted or in depth work

In order to access level 2 or 3 services we ask voluntary/community organisations to become a member of Northampton Volunteering Centre.

Membership is free.

For more information about membership or the work we do please contact us.

our contact details

Where to find us

Northampton Volunteering Centre
15 St Giles Street
Northampton
NN1 1JA

Phone: 01604 637522
Fax: 01604 601221
Email: info@northampton-volunteers.org.uk
Web: www.northampton-volunteers.org.uk

Opening hours

Monday 10am - 6pm
Tuesday - Friday 10 am - 4 pm

Support outside these hours can be arranged
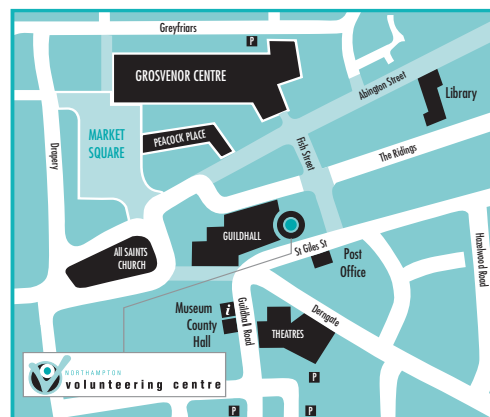
Registered Charity No: 1087513
Company Ltd by Guarantee in England and Wales No. 4184061

Support Services

for **voluntary organisations**
and **community groups**
in **Northampton**

NORTHAMPTON
**volunteering
centre**

services available

Northampton Volunteering Centre (NVC) exists to promote volunteering and to support the local voluntary and community sector.

As the Local Hub for the Northampton voluntary and community sector NVC provides support services and signposts to other sources of help.

We provide: access to user-friendly information; and a range of one off and ongoing support for voluntary and community organisations on a range of subjects, including:

❖ Funding sources
❖ Planning
❖ Management committees
❖ Developing a constitution
❖ Charity registration
❖ Personnel issues
❖ Legal issues
❖ Starting a new group
❖ Publicity/marketing
❖ Quality standards
❖ Working with volunteers
❖ Volunteer brokerage

You can access our help through face-to-face sessions or by email or telephone.

our services in more detail

Information

❖ Information packs and resource lists.

❖ A resource library of best practice information available for reference and loan.

❖ Access to web based information.

❖ Someone to help find the information you need.

One to One help

❖ One to one sessions on issues affecting your organisation.

❖ Help with searches for possible funders using Funderfinder or other sources.

❖ Help for those thinking of starting a new group.

Practical resources

❖ Free Internet use to access online information or use email.

❖ A laptop and printer loan service for small groups.

our services in more detail

Working with volunteers

❖ Volunteer brokerage service - linking potential volunteers to opportunities.

❖ Support for work with volunteers and help to develop volunteer involvement.

❖ Volunteer Managers Forum - for volunteer programme managers and people who supervise volunteers to share and learn best practice and ideas.

Training & Consultancy

We provide a link to a range of training to support you or your group and offer some in house and bespoke training. We also offer individual fee based consultancy.

Signposting

A key part of our role is to link services and support. We work to help people find and access the best type of help. We will signpost you to external sources of expertise as appropriate.

Northampton Voluntary and Community Sector Forum

We support this forum - which is open to all voluntary and community organisations in Northampton - providing a route for a collective voice and effective representation.

KPMG

INFRASTRUCTURE, GOVERNMENT AND HEALTHCARE

External Audit: Audit Memorandum – Report to those charged with governance

Northampton Borough Council

September 2007

AUDIT

Content

The contacts at KPMG in connection with this report are:

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Section one
Executive summary

Purpose of this document

The Audit Commission's Code of Audit Practice (the Code) requires us to provide a summary of the work we have carried out to discharge our statutory audit responsibilities together with any governance issues we have identified. We report to those charged with governance. In Northampton Borough Council's case the Audit Committee at the time they are considering the financial statements.

We are also required to comply with an International Standard on Auditing which sets out our responsibilities for communicating with those charged with governance (ISA260).

This report meets the requirements of the Code and the ISA260. It summarises, for the benefit of the Audit Committee of Northampton Borough Council, the key issues identified during the course of our audit of the financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2007. It has been prepared for presentation to the Audit Committee on 24th September 2007.

Once we have finalised our opinions and conclusions we will prepare our External Audit Annual Report to conclude on our audit work for 2006/07. This will feed into Annual Audit and Inspection Letter jointly prepared with your Audit Commission Relationship Manager.

Respective responsibilities of the appointed auditor and the audited body

Use of Resources

The Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources and regularly reviewing the adequacy and effectiveness of these arrangements.

Our responsibility is to satisfy ourselves that the Council has put in place proper arrangements by reviewing and, where appropriate, examining evidence that is relevant to its corporate performance management, and also its financial management arrangements and reporting on these arrangements.

We are required to be satisfied that you have put proper arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in your use of resources. We reach this conclusion by considering the Use of Resources (UOR) assessment for 2005/06 and your 2006/07 UOR self–assessment. Based upon this, we have concluded that the Council has not made proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. Our findings are set out in more detail in section two of this report and our proposed conclusion is set out in Appendix 1.

Accounts and Statement on Internal Control

The Council is responsible for putting into place systems of internal control to ensure the regularity and lawfulness of transactions, to maintain proper accounting records and to prepare financial statements that present fairly its financial position and its expenditure and income for the relevant financial year. The Council is also responsible for preparing and publishing with its financial statements a statement on internal control.

We have now substantially completed the audit in line with the deadline. We have not identified any issues in the course of the audit that are considered to be material. Subject to completing the final stages of the audit and receiving your management representations letter we therefore aim to issue an unqualified audit opinion on 28th September 2007. We have also provided you with a summary of the accounts production process and how this can be improved in the future (assuming no further issues arise). Our findings are set out in more detail in section three of this report and our proposed opinion on the accounts is presented in Appendix 2.

Reports

We have a duty under section 8 of the Audit Commission Act 1998 to consider whether, in the public interest, to report on any matter that comes to their attention in the course of the audit in order for it to be considered by the body concerned or brought to the attention of the public.

We did not issue a report in the public interest in 2006/07.

Certificate

We are required to certify that we have completed the audit of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Audit Commission Act 1998 and the Code of Audit Practice. If there are any circumstances under which we cannot issue a certificate, then we are required to report them to those charged with governance and to issue a draft opinion on the financial statements.

There are no issues that have come to our attention during the course of the audit that would cause us to delay the issue of our certificate of completion of the audit.

Executive summary

Audit status

At the date of issue of this memorandum our detailed audit work is substantially complete subject to completion of audit work on the following areas:

• Capital additions;

•Capital financing;

•HRA repairs and maintenance; and

•Benefits reconciliation

We now require from you a signed management representation letter, as set out in Appendix 8. In addition to this we are also asking for specific assurance from you that DSO trading with WS Atkins has ceased and Far Cotton Community Centre has been completed satisfactorily in accordance with the contract.

Declaration of independence and objectivity

In relation to the audit of the financial statements of Northampton Borough Council for the financial year ending 31 March 2007, we confirm that there were no relationships between KPMG LLP and the Council, its directors and senior management and its affiliates that we consider may reasonably be thought to bear on the objectivity and independence of the audit engagement lead and audit staff. We also confirm that we have complied with Ethical Standards and the Audit Commission's requirements in relation to independence and objectivity.

We have set out a more detailed declaration of our independence and objectivity in Appendix 6 in accordance with ISA 260.

Fees

Our fee for the accounts audit is approximately £150,000. This exceeds the figure included in the Annual Audit and Inspection Plan by £30,000 for a number of reasons as detailed in Appendix 7.

 We have not performed any other non-audit work.

Section two
Use of Resources

We are required to be satisfied that you have put proper arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in your use of resources. We reach this conclusion by considering the Use of Resources (UOR) assessment for 2005/06.   Based upon this, we have concluded that the Council has NOT made proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

Introduction

Within our audit plan we outlined the various work streams we use to assess the Authority against the 12 criteria specified by the Audit Commission to ensure that your resources are deployed effectively. The table below summarises our assessment against the 12 criteria.

Code criterion	Source of evidence	Score given	Assessment
Setting strategic and operational objectives	Our assessment against these criteria is informed by the Audit Commission.		Not Achieved
Consultation with stakeholders			Not Achieved
Monitoring and scrutiny of performance			Not Achieved
Data quality	As noted in our 2007/08 Audit and Inspection Plan, we have recently performed a review of the Authority's arrangements to ensure data quality.	Data quality KLOEs	Achieved
System of internal control	Our assessment against these criteria is informed by our work on the Audit Commission's Use of Resources KLOEs. The relevant KLOEs and scores for these criteria are, respectively:	KLOE 4.2: level 1	Not Achieved
Risk management		KLOE 4.1: level 1	Not Achieved
Managing and improving value for money		KLOE 5.2: level 1	Not Achieved
Medium term financial planning and budgeting		KLOE 2.1: level 1	Not Achieved
Managing spending within available resources		KLOE 3.1: level 1	Not Achieved
Managing performance against budgets		KLOE 2.2: level 1	Not Achieved
Asset management		KLOE 2.3: level 1	Not Achieved
Probity and propriety		KLOE 4.3: level 1	Not Achieved

In November 2007 we will submit our assessment of the 2007 Use of Resources to the Audit Commission who will issue the score in January 2008.

Other work

If we are asked to do so, or if we identify a need for it, as auditors we are expected to perform other work as necessary to meet our responsibilities under the Audit Code of Practice. We have not undertaken any other work.

Accounts and Statement on Internal Control

We have now completed the audit in line with the deadline. We have not identified any issues in the course of the audit to date that are considered to be material. On receiving your management representations letter we therefore propose to issue an unqualified audit opinion on 28th September 2007 subject to completing the outstanding elements of the audit). We have also provided you with a summary of the accounts production process and how this can be improved in the future.

Introduction

The tasks we perform in our review of your financial statements are split between those which are undertaken before, during and after the accounts production. We have summarised them below:

Work Performed	Accounts production stage		
	Before	During	After
1. Business Understanding: review your operations.	✓	✓	-
2. Controls: assess the control framework.	✓	-	-
3. Prepared by client list: issue our prepared by client request.	✓	-	-
4. Accounting standards: agree the impact of any new accounting standards.	✓	✓	-
5. Accounts Production: review the accounts production process.	✓	✓	✓
6. Testing: test and confirm material or significant balances and disclosures.	-	✓	-
7. Representations & opinions : seek and provide representations before issuing our opinions.	✓	✓	✓

We will report on the work we performed relating to the pre-accounts production stage in more detail as part of our Annual External Audit Report later in the year. We have however summarised below details of some of the tasks which we have performed:

Controls

Internal Audit

In accordance with the managed audit, we work with Internal Audit to assess the control framework that you have put in place to initiate, process and record your transactions. In order to confirm our ability to place reliance on the work of Internal Audit we review aspects of it's work i.e. re-perform the key reconciliations for each fundamental system, re- perform a sample of tests completed by Internal Audit, confirm the work they have completed on each system by reviewing the audit evidence and finally we carry out our own walk-through of the key financial systems to ensure we reach the same conclusion given by Internal Audit.

For 2006/07 the Council used PwC to provide it with internal audit services. We concluded that we could place reliance on most of the work completed by PwC for our opinion purposes. We have discussed our findings with PwC and are in the process of agreeing an internal/ external audit protocol which sets out the supporting information we need to be able to place full reliance on their work in future years.

The work completed by internal audit highlighted a number of improvements in the controls operating in a number of systems. The table below shows the level of assurance provided by internal audit and how this impacts on our audit.

System	Assurance given by PwC	Impact on the audit
Debtors	No Assurance	Substantive audit approach
Creditors	Limited Assurance	Substantive audit approach
Payroll (Agresso only)	Limited Assurance	Substantive audit approach
General Ledger	Limited Assurance	Substantive audit approach
Budgetary Control	No Assurance	Substantive audit approach

Continued overleaf

Accounts and Statement on Internal Control

System	Assurance given by PwC	Impact on the audit
Council Tax	Limited Assurance	Substantive audit approach
NNDR	High Assurance	Controls approach
Bank Reconciliations	Moderate Assurance	Substantive audit approach
Cashiers	Moderate Assurance	Controls approach
Treasury Management	Moderate Assurance	Controls approach
Fixed Asset	No Assurance	Substantive audit approach
Housing Benefit	Limited Assurance	Substantive audit approach
Payroll (Unipay)	No work completed by PwC Limited Assurance	Controls testing undertaken by KPMG Substantive audit approach
Rents	No work completed by PwC Moderate Assurance	Controls testing undertaken by KMPG Controls approach

A significant number (over 50%) of Internal Audit's recommendations raised in 2005/06 have not been implemented on the fundamental financial systems. There is a risk that weaknesses in systems are not being controlled appropriately so that information included in the accounts may be inaccurate.

Recommendation

The Council should ensure that actions agreed in response to recommendations raised by Internal Audit are implemented on a timely basis so that weaknesses in systems are addressed at the earliest opportunity.

We continue to support the recommendations raised by Internal Audit and have not reiterated these in this report.

IT Controls

We have completed a review of your general IT controls. We identified a number of improvements which could be made which have been discussed and agreed with management. We shall report our findings in more details in a separate report to be issued shortly.

Accounting standards

Local Authorities are required to prepare their Accounts in accordance with the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP). There have been significant revisions to the (SORP) for 2006/07, which required Local Authorities to re-state the prior year figures in a number of areas. We held a number of meetings with the Assistant Head of Finance to discuss the approach the Council intended to follow to ensure compliance with the new SORP.

Below we focus on stages five and six which we perform following the Council's production of its accounts:

Accounts Production

Your accounts production process is assessed as part of our UoR assessment. As part of the initial feedback on this process we have considered the production process against three criteria:

Element	Commentary
Completeness of draft accounts	The draft financial statements were approved by Audit Committee on the 28th June 2007. We received a draft set prior to the commencement of our audit on 30th July 2007. All disclosure notes were complete and the draft accounts were not subject to any material adjustments.
Quality of supporting working papers	We have raised concerns about the quality of the working papers since the 2004/05 financial accounts audit and have raised a number of detailed recommendations over the past two years. Whilst some progress has been made there is still scope for improvement in this area. As part of our interim audit, we issued a 'Prepared by Client' (PBC) request that set out a list of supporting documentation required for our final accounts audit. A number of working papers were not available at the start of the audit and those that were available did not provide sufficient detail as required by our PBC. This resulted in delays in completing the audit work in particular in the following areas: •Payroll; •Debtors and Creditors; •Collection Fund; and •Capital additions and disposals. The Council introduced a quality assurance process for the production of working papers for the 2006/07 audit process. Whilst this is welcomed it requires further development to ensure that working papers provide clear evidence to support balances in the accounts. Working papers could also be simplified to facilitate a more efficient audit.
Response to audit queries	A protocol for raising audit queries was introduced by NBC for this years audit. The target for responding to the query raised was three days. Unfortunately, the target was not met in most instances, due mainly to key members of staff being on annual leave. This resulted in delays in completing the audit work.

As a result of the above we have raised a number of performance improvement observations which are included within Appendix 4. We are also proposing to hold a debrief workshop with officers. Progress against the performance improvement observations raised following the 2005/06 audit are detailed at Appendix 5.

Testing

During the audit testing process we identified a number of issues that have not been adjusted by management as they do not have a material effect on the financial statements.   In accordance with ISA 260 we are required to communicate these uncorrected audit differences to the Audit Committee. We are also required to report any material misstatements which have been corrected by management and which we believe should be communicated to the Audit Committee to help you meet your governance responsibilities.

We have enclosed a summary of the corrected audit differences in Appendix 3. The table below summarises the issues identified:

Accounts and Statement on Internal Control

Overall impact	Adjustments identified
Changes to the prime financial statements	We identified a number of balance sheet adjustments. These concerned the accounting treatment for late cash and netting off debtor and creditor balances for Benefits. We also identified a number of income and expenditure adjustments. The main one being the treatment of expenditure incurred prior to the sale of an asset, this has not been adjusted as detailed at Appendix 3 to this report.
Changes to the Notes/Presentational adjustments	There are a number of presentational changes which have been agreed with the Assistant Head of Finance. These mainly relate to compliance with the Statement Of Recommended Practice.
Statement of Internal Control (SIC)	We raised a number of issues with regard to the content of the SIC submitted with the draft accounts. We have subsequently received an amended version which is more consistent with our knowledge and understanding of the Authority and the CIPFA guidance referred to below.

Opinions and Representations

As part of the financial statements finalisation process we are required to provide you with representations concerning our independence and ability to act as your auditors. We have provided this at Appendix 6.

You are required to provide us with representations on specific matters such as your financial standing and whether the transactions within the accounts are legal and unaffected by fraud. We provided a draft of this representation letter to the Director of Finance on 23 July 07. We have also included a copy of this at Appendix 8. Once we have received your representations as outlined above we will proceed to issuing our audit opinion.

Except for our commentary above, we do not have any other matters that we wish to draw to your attention before we issue our opinions.

Compliance with ISA260 Reporting Requirements

ISA260 requires us to communicate to those charged with governance "audit matters of governance interest that arise from the audit of the financial statements".

We have included within this Audit Memorandum:

• our views about the qualitative aspects of your accounting practices and financial reporting (Section Three);

• a copy of our proposed audit report (Appendix 2);

• details of the corrected audit adjustments within the financial statements (Appendix 3); and

• a draft of the management representations letter (Appendix 8).

We are also required to report:

• any material weaknesses in internal control identified during the audit;

• any matters specifically required by other ISAs (UK and Ireland) to be communicated to those charged with governance; and

• any other audit matters of governance interest.

Where appropriate these have been commented on in our report.

Appendix 1: Proposed use of resources conclusion

Authority's Responsibilities

The authority is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, to ensure proper stewardship and governance, and to regularly review the adequacy and effectiveness of these arrangements.

Under the Local Government Act 1999, the authority is required to prepare and publish a best value performance plan summarising the authority's assessment of its performance and position in relation to its statutory duty to make arrangements to ensure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Auditor's Responsibilities

We are required by the Audit Commission Act 1998 to be satisfied that proper arrangements have been made by the authority for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. The Code of Audit Practice issued by the Audit Commission requires us to report to you our conclusion in relation to proper arrangements, having regard to relevant criteria specified by the Audit Commission for principal local authorities. We report if significant matters have come to our attention which prevent us from concluding that the authority has made such proper arrangements. We are not required to consider, nor have we considered, whether all aspects of the authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources are operating effectively.

We are required by section 7 of the Local Government Act 1999 to carry out an audit of the authority's best value performance plan and issue a report:

- certifying that we have done so;
- stating whether we believe that the plan has been prepared and published in accordance with statutory requirements set out in section 6 of the Local Government Act 1999 and statutory guidance; and
- where relevant, making any performance improvement observations under section 7 of the Local Government Act 1999.

Conclusion

We have undertaken our audit in accordance with the Code of Audit Practice and we are not satisfied that, having regard to the criteria for principal local authorities specified by the Audit Commission, in all significant respects, Northampton Borough Council did not make proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ending 31 March 2007.

Best Value Performance Plan

We issued our statutory report on the audit of the authority's best value performance plan for the financial year 2006/07 on 21 December 2006. We did not identify any matters to be reported to the authority and did not make any performance improvement observations on procedures in relation to the plan.

Certificate

We certify that we have completed the audit of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Audit Commission Act 1998 and the Code of Audit Practice issued by the Audit Commission.

KPMG LLP
Chartered Accountants
Birmingham

September 2007

Appendix 2: Proposed audit report

Independent auditors' report to the Members of Northampton Borough Council

Opinion on the financial statements

We have audited the financial statements of Northampton Borough Council for the year ended 31 March 2007 under the Audit Commission Act 1998, which comprise the Explanatory Foreword, the Income and Expenditure Account, the Statement of Movement on the General Fund Balance, the Housing Income and Expenditure Account, the Statement of Movement on the Housing Account Balance, the Statement of Total Recognised Gains and Losses, the Balance Sheet, the Cash Flow Statement, the Collection Fund, and the related notes. These financial statements have been prepared under the accounting policies set out within them.

This report is made solely to Northampton Borough Council, as a body, in accordance with Part II of the Audit Commission Act 1998. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to Northampton Borough Council, as a body, those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than Northampton Borough Council, as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

Respective responsibilities of the Chief Finance Officer and auditors

The Chief Finance Officer's responsibilities for preparing the financial statements, in accordance with applicable laws and regulations and the Statement of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2006 are set out in the Statement of Responsibilities.

Our responsibility is to audit the financial statements in accordance with relevant legal and regulatory requirements and International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland).

We report to you our opinion as to whether the financial statements present fairly the financial position of Northampton Borough Council in accordance with applicable laws and regulations and the Statement of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2006.

We review whether the Statement on Internal Control reflects compliance with CIPFA's guidance The Statement on Internal Control in Local Government: Meeting the Requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003 published in April 2004. We report if it does not comply with proper practices specified by CIPFA or if the statement is misleading or inconsistent with other information we are aware of from our audit of the financial statements. We are not required to consider, nor have we considered, whether the statement on internal control covers all risks and controls. We are also not required to form an opinion on the effectiveness of the Authority's corporate governance procedures or its risk and control procedures.

Basis of audit opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with the Audit Commission Act 1998, the Code of Audit Practice issued by the Audit Commission and International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland) issued by the Auditing Practices Board. An audit includes examination, on a test basis, of evidence relevant to the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements. It also includes an assessment of the significant estimates and judgments made by the Authority in the preparation of the financial statements, and of whether the accounting policies are appropriate to the Authority's circumstances, consistently applied and adequately disclosed.

We planned and performed our audit so as to obtain all the information and explanations which we considered necessary in order to provide us with sufficient evidence to give reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free from material misstatement, whether caused by fraud or other irregularity or error. In forming our opinion we also evaluated the overall adequacy of the presentation of information in the financial statements.

Opinion

In our opinion:

The financial statements present fairly, in accordance with applicable laws and regulations and the Statement of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2006, the financial position of the Authority as at 31 March 2007 and its income and expenditure for the year then ended.

KPMG LLP

Chartered Accountants
Birmingham

September 2007

Appendix 3: Audit differences

We are required by *ISA (UK and Ireland) 260 Communication of Audit Matters to Those Charged with Governance* to communicate all uncorrected misstatements, other than those that we believe are clearly trivial, to the Audit Committee. We are also required to report all material misstatements that management has corrected but that we believe should be communicated to the Audit Committee to assist it in fulfilling its governance responsibilities.

This appendix sets out the audit differences that we identified following the completion of our audit of Northampton Borough Council for the year ended 31 March 2007.

Corrected audit differences

Detailed below are the audit differences identified by our audit of the financial statements that have been corrected by Northampton Borough Council.

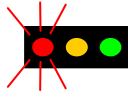| Impact		Basis of audit difference	Reason for adjustment
Income and expenditure	Balance sheet		
	Dr FARA £10,600k Cr Council Dwellings £8,290k Cr Other land & buildings £2,096k Cr Other housing property £206k Cr Investment & Commercial £8k	Write back of depreciation charged in year	The Authority has incorrectly written-back the depreciation charge for the year. This is not in line with FRS15.
Dr Interest Payable £390k Cr Interest Receivable £390k		Mis-posting of interest receivable to interest payable relating to an NCC loan	Misallocation of interest receivable,
	Dr Local Taxpayers creditors £654k Cr Local Taxpayers debtors £654k	Posting of cash received on 31/03/07 for NNDR to prepayments rather than against arrears	Incorrect treatment of late cash received.
	Dr Gov Dept creditors £353k Cr Gov Dept debtors £353k	Classification of brought forward debtor figure from 2005/06 as a creditor (Council Tax Subsidy)	Incorrect treatment of brought forward figure.

There are no uncorrected audit differences.

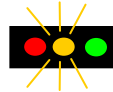# Appendix 4: Accounts performance improvement observations

This appendix summarises the performance improvements that we have identified relating to the accounts production process while preparing this report. We have given each of our observations a risk rating (as explained below) and agreed with management what action you will need to take.

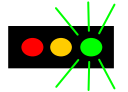| Priority rating for performance improvement observations raised |
|---|

Priority one: issues that are fundamental and material to your system of internal control. We believe that these issues might mean that you do not meet a system objective or reduce (mitigate) a risk.	**Priority two:** issues that have an important effect on internal controls but do not need immediate action. You may still meet a system objective in full or in part or reduce (mitigate) a risk adequately but the weakness remains in the system.	**Priority three**: issues that would, if corrected, improve the internal control in general but are not vital to the overall system. These are generally issues of best practice that we feel would benefit you if you introduced them.

Number	Risk	Issue and recommendation	Management response	Officer and due date
1	● (two)	**Working Papers** We issued a "Prepared by Client" (PBC) request that set out a list of supporting documentation required for our final accounts audit. A number of working papers were not available at the start of the audit and those that were available did not provide sufficient detail as required by our PBC. The Council should ensure the financial statements are supported by documentation at the start of the audit.		
2	● (one)	Our review of the fixed asset register revealed a number of differences between the register and balances stated in the ledger, which were accounted for as 'balancing adjustments'. The Authority should seek to resolve this query and consider the impact on financial planning.		
3	● (two)	The payroll is now run through a module of the general ledger, Agresso. However there is still a need for reconciliation of the payroll module to the general ledger as not all pay related transactions are performed in the payroll ledger. No such reconciliation is currently performed. The Council should ensure that reconciliations between modules within IT packages are carried out.		
4	● (two)	A significant number (over 50%) of Internal Audit's recommendation raised in 2005/06 on the fundamental financial systems have not been implemented to date. Consequently, there is a risk that weaknesses in systems are not being controlled appropriately so that information included in the accounts may be inaccurate. The Council should ensure that actions agreed in response to recommendations raised by Internal Audit are implemented on a timely basis.		

Number	Risk	Issue and recommendation	Management response	Officer and due date
5	● (two)	The bad debt provision is calculated using percentages set out in guidance which is several years out of date. Current CIPFA guidance says that the provision for bad debts should be set on the basis of a local assessment of the recoverability of debts. An assessment of the recoverability of different classes of a debt should be performed to allow a more accurate provision for bad debts to be set (or to confirm the Authority is content with the current approach).		
6	● (two)	The Authority introduced a new computer system (Northgate) in January 2006 to process Council Tax and Benefits. It is currently possible for a new property to be created on the system without linking to a liable individual. There is therefore a risk that new properties are input on the system without a bill being produced. Reconciliation should be performed of the number of properties to liable individuals. This will ensure that all properties are billed for.		
7	● (two)	HRA rent arrears as at 31st March 2007 represented 7.6% of the year's gross debit. Current tenant arrears have increased by 11% since the year end. A review should be undertaken of the arrears recovery process to ascertain what steps could be taken to reduce the level of arrears.		
8	● (two)	We identified a number of debtor and creditor balances requiring amendment. 'Contra' accounts are used in the general ledger to track reallocation between codes. However, this current system does not provide a clear audit trail as to the final debtor and creditor balances. The system for reallocation should be reviewed to reduce the number of debtor and creditor accounts and to ensure accounts record the correct balance.		
9	● (two)	The Cashflow statement was compiled using a complicated model. Efficiencies could be realised by simplifying the compilation of the cashflow. The method for compiling the Cashflow statement should be reviewed with a view to simplifying it.		

Number	Risk	Issue and recommendation	Management response	Officer and due date
10	● (two)	There is an ongoing (since 2004/05) query with DCLG regarding the pooling of HRA capital receipts. The Authority should seek to resolve this query and consider the impact on financial planning.		
11	● (one)	Capital expenditure is not monitored by Cabinet during the year. An outturn report had not been presented to Council as at 19th September 2007. Performance reporting to Members should be enhance to include key financial information including capital expenditure against the capital programme and collection rates of Council Tax and NNDR.		
12	● (one)	In pursuing rental arrears, some cases are referred to court. Current practice is that cheques payable to HMCS are written in bulk, stored in a drawer and sent to HMCS when required. Cheques should only be produced when required.		
13	● (one)	Our review of the bank reconciliation revealed a number of errors and issues. Reconciling items were incorrectly recorded, BACS transfers were shown as unpresented and several cancelled cheques were shown as unpresented. The Authority should review its quality control process over the bank reconciliation and ensure an effective review of the completed reconciliation is performed.		
14	● (two)	We identified a number of leases which were not disclosed in the accounts. The SORP contains requirements on disclosing all leases and their classification as either operating or finance leases. A central register of all leases should be maintained. This will facilitate the accounts production process and enable effective monitoring of leases.		
15	● (one)	The Authority operates a Building Control Account. Government regulations state that authorities must ensure income matches expenditure over a three year period on chargeable work. The chargeable account has operated at a deficit for the past three years with a cumulative deficit of £211,000. The Authority should review income and expenditure making up charges for the chargeable work operated through the Building Control account in the context of Government regulations.		

Appendix 5: Follow up of 2005/06 Accounts performance improvement observations

This appendix summarises the progress made to implement the performance improvements that we identified during last years final accounts audit. We have given each of our observations a risk rating (as explained in Appendix 4). In summary:.

Year	Number of performance improvement observations that were:		
	Included in original report	Implemented in year or superseded	Remain outstanding (re-iterated below)
2005-06	Audit Memorandum – Report to those charged with governance		

#	Risk	Issue and performance improvement observation	Initial Management response	Progress to date
1	● (one)	**Monitoring and Reporting Financial Performance** Having set the 2005/06 budget in February 2005, no reports were produced on a regular basis in year to members comparing actual performance with that budget. Nor has there been a detailed revenue outturn report presented to members explaining the year end position against the revenue budget. A capital outturn report was presented to members but did not include adequate explanation of variances against the capital programme. The Authority should ensure that detailed monitoring reports with recommended courses of action where necessary, are prepared for members in a timely fashion at least quarterly throughout the year. In addition detailed outturn reports should be prepared for members explaining the year end position against the revenue and capital budgets. The Authority should ensure that the reports are in a format that enables members to have a full understanding of the reasons for variances against budget.	A number of monitoring reports were made during the year to the Executive and Improvement Board. The overall outturn position was reported with the Statement of Accounts and more detailed revenue and capital outturn reports have been produced. Monitoring reports are being produced for 2006/07 starting with the half-yearly position. The format of these reports is under review to improve the information provided to members and to the public.	Monitoring reports were produced for 2006/07 starting with the half yearly position. Reports were produced for senior management on a monthly basis but were not brought regularly to cabinet until late in the 2006/07 financial year. An outturn report for 2006/07 has been presented to Cabinet and monitoring reports for 2007/08 are being presented to Cabinet on a monthly basis.
2	● (two)	**Grants and Contributions Deferred** The Authority's policy is not to depreciate assets in the year of acquisition, however grants and contributions towards fixed assets are written down in the year of acquisition. Therefore the expenditure and income are not matched in the same year. This needs to be corrected in 2006/07. The Authority need to undertaken an exercise to establish the mismatch and correct it accordingly.		The corrective action required has been undertaken.
3	● (one)	**Insurance Reserve** The insurance 'fund' (reserve and provision) was actuarially valued at 31/3/06 at £2.1m. The total value of the fund at that date is £3.4m, therefore the Authority has £1.3m greater in the insurance reserve than the actuary considers necessary. The Authority should consider releasing the insurance reserve as part of the 07/08 budget setting process.		The insurance reserve was adjusted to the actuarial position as part of the 2006/07 year end process.

Appendix 5: Follow up of 2005/06 Accounts performance improvement observations

#	Risk	Issue and performance improvement observation	Management response	Progress to date
4	● (one)	**Working Papers** In parts the audit was significantly delayed as a result of working papers not being prepared until the last week of the audit visit, in particular: •Bank reconciliation; •Collection Fund; and •Payroll To complete our required audit work within the allocated timescale, and to prevent the Authority incurring overrun audit fees, it is vital that we receive all working papers at the start of the audit visit which clearly link to the financial statements.	It is agreed that these working papers were not finalised until late in the audit. It has always been the intention to continually improve the standard of all working papers so that they fulfil the requirements of both the Council and our auditors. These particular working papers will be reviewed as a high priority for improvement.	The working papers for 2005/06 have been improved for the 2006/07 final accounts production. It is recognised that there are still some areas for improvement and the quality of year end working papers will continue to be a focus of the year end process for 2007/08.
5	● (one)	**Bank Reconciliation** The review of the bank reconciliation identified a considerable number of unexplained reconciling items. A significant amount of time was spent investigating these items, and a material audit adjustment was identified. The Authority should review its process for completing the bank reconciliation to ensure that a proper reconciliation to the ledger is completed for all bank accounts on a monthly basis. The format/presentation of these reconciliations also needs reviewing.	The overall arrangements for banking and bank reconciliation is subject to a fundamental review as part of the Council's review into overall financial controls. Control on monthly bank reconciliations is being put in place with immediate effect.	Bank reconciliations were reviewed during 2006/07 and some areas for improvement have been identified. Detailed bank reconciliations have been completed for some of the accounts but the remainder are incorporated in a global reconciliation. For 2007/08, the results of the review will be incorporated into new procedures for regular individual reconciliations.
6	● (one)	**Key Systems Reconciliations: Housing Benefits** Key reconciliations in respect of housing benefits were not prepared until late into the audit visit: •Housing Benefits system to the ledger; •Housing Benefits system to the rents system; •Housing Benefits system to the Council Tax system; and •Housing Benefits system to creditor payments made These reconciliations should be completed on a monthly basis and independently reviewed.	The reconciliation process for 2005/06 incorporated two housing benefits systems due to the implementation of a new improved system during 2005/06. Improvements are being made to the process for the 2006/07 financial year and reconciliations will be produced by the departments responsible for the systems which will then be reviewed by Finance.	Investigations into the interfacing between systems have been carried out and monthly reconciliations will be implemented from early 2008.

Appendix 5: Follow up of 2005/06 Accounts performance improvement observations

#	Risk	Issue and performance improvement observation	Initial management response	Progress to date
7	● (one)	**Bad Debt Provision** The Authority's policy for the provision for bad debts has not been reviewed for a number of years. The policy should be reviewed to ensure that the basis of the provision for bad debts is derived from collection rates for the various types of debt.	A review will be undertaken during this financial year. Improvements in the systems involved in the collection of debts are currently being planned and a further review will be undertaken when the information systems are improved.	The calculation of and accounting for the bad debt provision and write offs was reviewed during the 2006/07 financial year and was implemented for the 2006/07 closedown. A further review will be carried out when the Sundry Income system is upgraded to identify improved management information.
8	● (one)	**HRA Rent Arrears** At 31 March 2006 rent arrears remain high, at almost 8% of the debit. The Authority should review its arrangements for the collection of rent and former tenant arrears to ensure the rent arrears position is improved.	A new Housing Management System is currently being implemented. This system will allow for improved management of the rent arrears.	A new Housing Management System is currently being implemented, however arrears remain relatively high.
9	● (one)	**Far Cotton Community Centre** A number of issues have been identified around the Far Cotton Community Centre capital scheme. These will be subject to separate communication with the Authority.		Far Cotton Community Centre was completed during 2006/07 and opened at the end of March 2007.
10	● (two)	**Leased Assets** The SORP states that where the Authority acts as the lessor in an operating lease, a disclosure note should be included with the balance sheet detailing the amount of asset held for use in operating leases and the related accumulated depreciation charges. The Authority should ensure that this disclosure is made in the 2006/07 Statement of Accounts.	Agreed	Accumulated depreciation charges are being disclosed as part of the notes in the 2006/07 Statement of Accounts.

Appendix 6: ISA 260 Declaration of independence and objectivity

Declaration of Independence and Objectivity 2006/07

Auditors appointed by the Audit Commission must comply with the *Code of Audit Practice* (the Code) which states that:

"Auditors and their staff should exercise their professional judgement and act independently of both the Audit Commission and the audited body. Auditors, or any firm with which an auditor is associated, should not carry out work for an audited body, which does not relate directly to the discharge of auditors' functions, if it would impair the auditors' independence or might give rise to a reasonable perception that their independence could be impaired"

In considering issues of independence and objectivity we consider relevant professional, regulatory and legal requirements and guidance, including the provisions of the Code, the detailed provisions of the Statement of Independence included within the Audit Commission's *Annual Letter of Guidance and Standing Guidance* (Audit Commission Guidance) and the requirements of APB Ethical Standard 1 *Integrity, Objectivity and Independence* ('Ethical Standards').

The Code states that, in carrying out their audit of the financial statements, auditors should comply with auditing standards currently in force, and as may be amended from time to time. Audit Commission Guidance requires appointed auditors to follow the provisions of ISA (UK &I) 260 *Communication of Audit Matters with Those Charged with Governance*' that are applicable to the audit of listed companies. This means that the appointed auditor must disclose in writing:

- Details of all relationships between the auditor and the client, its directors and senior management and its affiliates, including all services provided by the audit firm and its network to the client, its directors and senior management and its affiliates, that the auditor considers may reasonably be thought to bear on the auditor's objectivity and independence;

- The related safeguards that are in place; and

- The total amount of fees that the auditor and the auditor's network firms have charged to the client and its affiliates for the provision of services during the reporting period, analysed into appropriate categories, for example, statutory audit services, further audit services, tax advisory services and other non-audit services. For each category, the amounts of any future services which have been contracted or where a written proposal has been submitted are separately disclosed.

Appointed auditors are also required to confirm in writing that they have complied with Ethical Standards and that, in the auditor's professional judgement, the auditor is independent and the auditor's objectivity is not compromised, or otherwise declare that the auditor has concerns that the auditor's objectivity and independence may be compromised and explaining the actions which necessarily follow from his. These matters should be discussed with the Audit Committee.

Ethical Standards require us to communicate to those charged with governance in writing at least annually all significant facts and matters, including those related to the provision of non-audit services and the safeguards put in place that, in our professional judgement, may reasonably be thought to bear on our independence and the objectivity of the Audit Partner and the audit team.

General procedures to safeguard independence and objectivity

KPMG's reputation is built, in great part, upon the conduct of our professionals and their ability to deliver objective and independent advice and opinions. That integrity and objectivity underpins the work that KPMG performs and is important to the regulatory environments in which we operate. All partners and staff have an obligation to maintain the relevant level of required independence and to identify and evaluate circumstances and relationships that may impair that independence.

Acting as an auditor places specific obligations on the firm, partners and staff in order to demonstrate the firm's required independence. KPMG's policies and procedures regarding independence matters are detailed in the Ethics and Independence Manual ('the Manual'). The Manual sets out the overriding principles and summarises the policies and regulations which all partners and staff must adhere to in the area of professional conduct and in dealings with clients and others.

Appendix 6: ISA 260 Declaration of independence and objectivity

KPMG is committed to ensuring that all partners and staff are aware of these principles. To facilitate this, a hard copy of the Manual is provided to everyone annually. The Manual is divided into two parts. Part 1 sets out KPMG's ethics and independence policies which partners and staff must observe both in relation to their personal dealings and in relation to the professional services they provide. Part 2 of the Manual summarises the key risk management policies which partners and staff are required to follow when providing such services.

All partners and staff must understand the personal responsibilities they have towards complying with the policies outlined in the Manual and follow them at all times. To acknowledge understanding of and adherence to the policies set out in the Manual, all partners and staff are required to submit an annual Ethics and Independence Confirmation. Failure to follow these policies can result in disciplinary action.

Auditor Declaration

In relation to the audit of the financial statements of Northampton Borough Council for the financial year ending 31 March 2007, we confirm that there were no relationships between KPMG LLP and the Northampton Borough Council, its directors and senior management and its affiliates that we consider may reasonably be thought to bear on the objectivity and independence of the audit engagement partner and audit staff. We also confirm that we have complied with Ethical Standards and the Audit Commission's requirements in relation to independence and objectivity.

Details of our fees for the financial year are given in Appendix 7.

This section summarises our overall arrangements for delivering your external audit in 2006/07. To make sure that there is openness between us and your Audit Committee about the extent of our fee relationship with you, we have summarised below the out-turn against the 2006/07 agreed external audit fee:
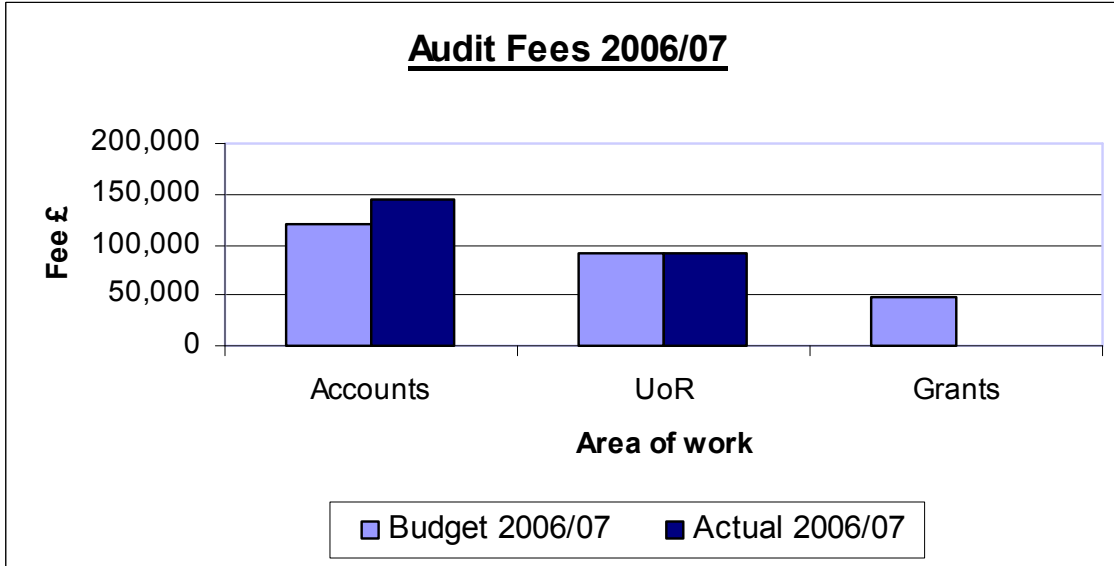
Subject to agreement with management the audit fee will be higher than the fee agreed in the audit plan, as shown in the graph above. This is due to overrun costs on the accounts audit. We have included estimated amounts in the above graph and will agree the final amounts in due course.

The grant claim work has not yet been completed.

Appendix 8: Draft management representation letter

Dear KPMG LLP,

We understand that auditing standards require you to obtain representations from management on certain matters material to your opinion. Accordingly we confirm to the best of our knowledge and belief, having made appropriate enquiries of other members of the Council, the following representations given to you in connection with your audit of the financial statements for Northampton Borough Council for the year ended 31 March 2006.

All the accounting records have been made available to you for the purpose of your audit and the full effect of all the transactions undertaken by Northampton Borough Council has been properly reflected and recorded in the accounting records in accordance with agreements, including side agreements, amendments and oral agreements. All other records and related information, including minutes of all management and Board meetings, have been made available to you.

We confirm that we have disclosed all material related party transactions relevant to the Council and that we are not aware of any other such matters required to be disclosed in the financial statements, whether under FRS 8 or other requirements.

We confirm that we are not aware of any actual or potential non-compliance with laws and regulations that would have had a material effect on the ability of the Council to conduct its business and therefore on the results and financial position to be disclosed in the financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2006.

We acknowledge that we are responsible for the fair presentation of the financial statements in accordance with the Local Government Statement of Recommended Practice ("SORP") and wider UK accounting standards. We have considered and approved the financial statements.

We confirm that we:

understand that the term "fraud" includes misstatements resulting from fraudulent financial reporting and misstatements resulting from misappropriation of assets. Misstatements resulting from fraudulent financial reporting involve intentional misstatements or omissions of amount or disclosures in financial statements to deceive financial statement users. Misstatements resulting from misappropriation of assets involve the theft of an entity's assets, often accompanies by false or misleading records or documents in order to conceal the fact that the assets are missing or have been pledged without proper authorisation;

are responsible for the design and implementation of internal control to prevent and detect fraud and error;

have disclosed to you our knowledge of fraud or suspected fraud affecting the Council involving:

- management;
- employees who have significant roles in internal control; or
- others where the fraud could have a material effect on the financial statements.

have disclosed to your our knowledge of any allegations of fraud, or suspected fraud, affecting the Council's financial statements communicated by employees, former employees, analysts, regulators or others;

have disclosed to you the results of our assessment of the risk that the financial statements may be materially misstated as a result of fraud.

We confirm that the presentation and disclosure of the fair value measurements of material assets, liabilities and components of equity are in accordance with applicable reporting standards. The amounts disclosed represent our best estimate of fair value of assets and liabilities required to be disclosed by these standards. The measurement methods and significant assumptions used in determining fair value have been applied on a consistent basis, are reasonable and they appropriately reflect our intent and ability to carry out specific courses of action on behalf of the Council where relevant to the fair value measurements or disclosures.

We confirm that there are no other contingent liabilities, other than those that have been properly recorded and disclosed in the financial statements. In particular:

there is no significant pending or threatened litigation, other than that already disclosed in the financial statements; and

there are no material commitments or contractual issues, other than those already disclosed in the financial statements.

Continued overleaf

Appendix 8: Draft management representation letter

With reference to the specific issues on which you have requested assurances from Members on the following:

- **Far Cotton Community Centre; and**

- **WS Atkins.**

Finally, no additional significant post balance sheet events have occurred that would require additional adjustment or disclosure in the financial statements, over and above those events already disclosed.

This letter was tabled at the meeting of the Audit Committee on 24th September 2007.

Yours faithfully

On behalf of the Members

Item No.

NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET REPORT

Report Title	STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2006/07

AGENDA STATUS: **PUBLIC**

Meeting Date:	25th September 2007
Key Decision:	No
Listed on Forward Plan:	YES
Within Policy:	YES
Policy Document:	NO
Directorate:	Governance and Improvement
Accountable Cabinet Member:	Malcolm Mildren
Ward(s)	Not Applicable

1.   Purpose

1.1   To note the external audit report by KPMG on the 2006/07 financial statements and use of resources.

1.2   To receive an update from the Audit Committee meeting of 24th September, on the 2006/07 Statement of Internal Control and the Statement of Accounts. Paragraph 3.2.10 details the main areas discussed.

2.   Recommendations

2.1   That the KPMG unqualified opinion of the 2006/07 accounts be noted.

2.2   That Cabinet, following their review of the comments made by the Audit Committee, recommend to Council that the 2006/07 Statement of Internal Control and the 2006/07 Statement of Accounts be approved.

3.   Issues and Choices

3.1   Report Background

3.1.1   The Council approved the draft 2006/07 Statement of Internal Control and Statement of Accounts at its meeting on 28th June 2007.

3.1.2   KPMG, our external auditors, have now audited the accounts and have presented their ISA 260 report. This is a report that is presented to those charged with Governance and will therefore be reported to the Council at its meeting on 27th September.

3.1.3   The Audit Committee received the external auditors report and the Finance Section's report on the 2006/07 Statement of Accounts at their meeting on 24th September.

3.1.4   This report addresses the items raised in the external auditors report and also summarises the updates made to the Statement of Internal Control and the Statement of Accounts since the June 2007 approval.

3.1.5   KPMG is required to give an opinion on whether the Council's financial statements present fairly the position of the Council as at 31st March 2007 and its income and expenditure for the year then ended.

3.1.6   The accounts have been completed on time for both the June 2007 approval of the draft accounts and for the post audited accounts in September 2007. This is in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.

3.2   **Issues**

3.2.1 **Use of Resources**

3.2.2 The Use of Resources assessment is detailed on page 4 of the KPMG report. This is however based on is the 2005/06 assessment. The 2006/07 evidence was submitted on the 3rd September 2007 and is currently being reviewed. It is anticipated that improvements will be acknowledged across all areas and we are anticipating a number of areas to increase to a score of 2 (out of 4).

3.2.3 The Data Quality criteria have been achieved.

3.2.4 **The Accounts and Statement of Internal Control**

3.2.5 The Statement of Internal Control and the Accounts have been updated and this is summarised on page 8 of the KPMG report and noted below. There have not been any material adjustments.

3.2.6 Changes to Prime Financial Statements – There have been a number of balance sheet adjustments. These concerned the accounting treatment for late cash and netting off debtor and creditor balances for Benefits.

3.2.7 Changes to the Notes/Presentational Adjustments – There are a number of presentational changes, which have been agreed. These mainly relate to compliance with the Statement of Recommended Practice. This is the Chartered Institute of Public Finance's (CIPFA) guide to accounts presentation.

3.2.8 Statement of Internal Control (SIC)– An amended version of the SIC is included as part of the statement of accounts. This is more in line with KPMG's knowledge of the authority and only minor amendments have been made.

3.2.9 In summary the changes are not material, mainly with movements between categorisations in the accounts, for example between debtors and creditors. There were only four corrected items following the audit of the accounts.

3.2.10 At the Audit Committee meeting of 24th September, the committee discussed the accounts and KPMG report. No further amendments are due to be made to the accounts as a result of this meeting. Further information has been requested by the committee on:

- The external audit fee for audit of the accounts has increased by £30k to £150k, a breakdown on these additional expenses has been requested.
- An analysis was requested from officers of the debts of the authority and the bad debt provisions set aside for these.
- An update from KPMG before the Council meeting of the 27th September regarding the Use of Resources score. The 2005/06 conclusion is being used for the 2006/07 score when the information submitted for 2006/07 has yet to be reviewed. KPMG are liaising with the Audit Commission on this and the timing issues.

3.2.11 Other Areas for Information

3.2.12 The accounts are currently being updated and checked following the above non material revisions and the full version will be presented to Council on the 27th September.

3.2.12 There are a number of accounts performance improvement observations that have been raised in the KPMG ISA 260 report and comments have been noted as a management response as part of the report. We will look to address these during 2007/08.

3.3   Choices (options)

3.3.1   Not applicable

4.   Implications (including Financial Implications)

4.1   Policy

4.1.1   Not applicable

4.2   Resources and Risk

4.2.1   Not applicable

4.3   Legal

4.2.2   The accounts need to be approved by the end of September 2007, in line with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003.

4.4	Equality
4.4.1	Not applicable

4.5	Consultees (Internal and External)
4.5.1	Stakeholders have been contacted as necessary, including an advertisement in the local paper that the accounts are open for audit and question.

4.6	How Proposals deliver Priority Outcomes
4.6.1	Not applicable

4.7	Other Implications
4.7.1	The timeliness of the approval of the accounts forms part of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Use of Resources assessment.

5.   Background Papers

5.1	Council Reports – 28th June 2007, the draft 2006/07 Statement of Accounts report to Council. Audit Committee report 24th September 2007. KPMG external audit report (ISA 260).

Gavin Chambers, Head of Finance – ext 7194

NORTHAMPTON
B O R O U G H   C O U N C I L

CABINET REPORT

Report Title	Audit Commission Progress Assessment – June 2007

AGENDA STATUS: **Public**

Cabinet Meeting Date:	25th September 2007
Key Decision:	NO
Listed on Forward Plan:	NO
Within Policy:	YES
Policy Document:	NO
Directorate:	Citizens, Finance & Governance
Accountable Cabinet Member:	Councillor Tony Woods
Ward(s)	N/A

1.   Purpose

1.1 For Cabinet to consider the findings of the Audit Commission assessment undertaken in June 2007.

2.   Recommendations

2.1   That Cabinet receives the assessment report.
2.2   That Cabinet note the progress made to date.
2.3   That Cabinet approves the actions set out in this report in section 3.3.

3.   Issues and Choices

3.1 Report Background

This new Progress Assessment reports the findings from the Audit Commission review which took place in June 2007 and which was received by this Council on 9th September.

This follows the earlier Audit Commission progress assessment published in February this year that reported that the Council had not made adequate progress in improving its performance. The report set out seven recommendations for action, followed in March by additional, specific criteria for improvement.

3.2 Issues

The Assessment concludes that the Council has made adequate progress towards implementing the recommendations contained in the February 2007 progress assessment. The report identifies a range of areas where progress has been made, together with areas for further improvement. A summary of these points follows below:

a) Areas of progress

- The Council is beginning to demonstrate stronger political leadership;
- Financial capacity and planning has improved and there are better financial controls in place;
- The Council's swift action to address weaknesses in the finance have been recognised;
- The Council has taken steps to ensure effective managerial leadership, and lines of accountability and responsibility are now clearer;
- Improvements to performance monitoring have been made and performance trends are largely positive.

b) Areas for further improvement and consolidation

- There is a need to ensure that our improvement is embedded and made resilient and sustainable;
- Corporate and service planning needs to be improved with a greater focus on the outcomes to be achieved;
- More work is needed to address forecasted budget overspends.

3.3 Action Being Taken

The Council's Improvement Plan sets out actions to address the areas for further improvement. These include:

- Continuing to strengthen political and managerial governance to ensure that progress is sustained, that new systems and processes are embedded and that decision makers have current and accurate information on the Council's performance.
- A new Corporate Planning process is underway with the aim of producing a robust Corporate Plan. Plans are in place to revise our approach to service planning in order to better reflect corporate and partnership priorities, to make targets and outcomes clearer and to make service plans more accessible to a wider audience.
- Budget monitoring is already in place and Management Board is taking action to address the issues arising.

3.4 Choices (options)
   1. Cabinet accept the findings of the Audit Commission report and endorses actions required to address areas of weakness.

4. Implications (including Financial Implications)

4.1 Policy
NONE.

4.2 Resources and Risk
FAILURE TO ADDRESS AREAS OF UNDER-PERFORMANCE COULD RESULT IN REFERRAL TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

4.3 Legal
THE RECOMMENDATIONS COMPLY WITH STANDING ORDERS AND FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

4.4 Equality
NONE

4.5 Consultees (Internal and External)

Group Leaders; Management Board

4.6 How Proposals deliver Priority Outcomes

Has a direct bearing on our plans for improvement.

4.7 Other Implications
None

5. Background Papers

Audit Commission progress Assessment Reports

Dale Phillipson, Corporate Manager – Performance, I.T. & Improvement, Ext 8273

Performance Summary Report

September 2007

audit
commission

Progress Report

Northampton Borough Council

Audit 2007/08

External audit is an essential element in the process of accountability for public money and makes an important contribution to the stewardship of public resources and the corporate governance of public services.

Audit in the public sector is underpinned by three fundamental principles:

* auditors are appointed independently from the bodies being audited;

* the scope of auditors' work is extended to cover not only the audit of financial statements but also value for money and the conduct of public business; and

* auditors may report aspects of their work widely to the public and other key stakeholders.

The duties and powers of auditors appointed by the Audit Commission are set out in the Audit Commission Act 1998, the Local Government Act 1999 and the Commission's statutory Code of Audit Practice. Under the Code of Audit Practice, appointed auditors are also required to comply with the current professional standards issued by the independent Auditing Practices Board.

Appointed auditors act quite separately from the Commission and in meeting their statutory responsibilities are required to exercise their professional judgement independently of both the Commission and the audited body.

Status of our reports

The Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies issued by the Audit Commission explains the respective responsibilities of auditors and of the audited body. Reports prepared by appointed auditors are addressed to non-executive directors or officers. They are prepared for the sole use of the audited body. Auditors accept no responsibility to:

* any director or officer in their individual capacity; or

* any third party.

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Background

1   In 2002, Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) was introduced at single tier and county councils (ST&CCs) and at district councils in 2003/04, as a way of supporting councils to deliver improvements in services to local people.

2   Councils have prepared improvement plans following CPA and those councils classified as 'under performing' have received annual progress assessments by the Audit Commission. Those cases giving most cause for concern have also been the subject of formal engagement by the Communities and Local Government Department (CLG).

3   In March 2004 the Audit Commission published a CPA category for Northampton Borough Council. This assessment categorised the Council as 'poor'.

4   In June 2005 the Audit Commission published a progress report which found that the Council had made slow progress, and that services had not improved for local people. In March 2006 the Audit Commission published a second progress report which found that limited progress had been made and that the Council still had much to do including applying a greater focus on improving some of its weakest services.

5   In February 2007, the Audit Commission published a further progress report that found that the Council had made little progress since 2004 and had deteriorated in some key areas since the previous progress assessment. Its weakest services, whilst showing some improvement, continued to be among the worst in the country. Some key services, such as planning, had deteriorated.

6   The report made the following recommendations.

Recommendations
R1   The Council must demonstrate stronger joint political leadership across all parties. The immediate priority for the strengthened leadership is to set a balanced budget for 2007/08 and ensure that this is delivered.
R2   The Council must ensure that it has effective managerial leadership which is critical to delivering the substantial improvements that must be achieved.
R3   The Council must urgently address weaknesses in the management and capacity in the finance function.
R4   The Council must strengthen its commitment to and engagement in strategic partnership working and co-operation with partners to develop joint delivery of services.
R5   The Council must continue to make improvements in service delivery. In the short-term the focus should be on delivering sustained improvements in housing, planning and benefits services.
R6   The Council must strengthen arrangements to secure the continuous improvement of services.
R7   The Council should take this report to an appropriate public committee meeting and share it with the Government Monitoring Board.

7   On 30 March 2007 we set out the Audit Commission's proposals for monitoring progress against these recommendations. Minimum expectations of progress were set against each of the recommendations together with a timescale for assessing progress. These documents are attached as Appendices 1 and 2 and have been used to provide a framework for this progress check.

Our approach

8   The progress check took the form of an initial document review supported by interviews with key councillors and officers. The interviews took place on 4 and 5 July 2007. The focus was on the minimum expectations that the Council was expected to achieve by June 2007.

9   The findings of this brief assessment will contribute to the more detailed direction of travel assessment in autumn 2007.

Main conclusions

10   The Council has made adequate progress towards implementing the recommendations of the progress assessment published in February 2007, but the improvements are not embedded and the Council has still to show that they are resilient and will be sustained. The improvements are often not well evidenced and not all the recommendations identified as minimum requirements for this progress check have been met in full.

11   Progress against each recommendation is set out below.

R1 Political leadership

12   The Council is beginning to demonstrate stronger political leadership. This has been brought about mainly as a result of the May elections which saw one party gaining overall control of the Council. This party is the Liberal Democrats. There is some evidence of a greater degree of co-operation from opposition parties but there have been limited opportunities for the Council to demonstrate the strength of this commitment.

13   After the elections in May 2007, the Interim Chief Executive prepared a joint agreement which was signed by all three group Leaders. This set out basic principles for political co-operation to positively and proactively support, facilitate and progress the Council's improvement agenda. The agreement also set out a commitment to respect these principles and to not display behaviour that would undermine the principles.

14   Since the Liberal Democrats gained overall control of the Council in May changes to the Council's constitution have strengthened the role of the Leader and Cabinet to improve decision making and strengthen overview and scrutiny. These changes were agreed at full Council on 28 June 2007.

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15 The Council set a balanced budget for 2007/08 which was agreed by full Council on 21 February 2007. This was identified as a key priority for strengthened political leadership. The potential shortfall in funding was met by efficiencies of approximately £2 million and savings of a further £4 million made up of reductions in service expenditure and a £0.8 million one-off use of reserves.

16 However, recent work by managers suggests that this budget may not be achievable. A report to Cabinet of 2 July 2007 forecasts an overspend of £963K unless immediate remedial action is taken. Work is underway to identify areas for further savings and to establish if there is likely to be a continuing impact of 2006/07 underspends in current and future financial years.

17 The Council has improved its financial capacity since the last progress assessment with the introduction and implementation of a new staffing structure. In addition its financial resources have improved by achieving significant contributions to earmarked and general reserves in 2006/07. The Council predicted in September 2006 an overspend on its 2006/07 budget of around £1.9 million, with mitigating action to be identified of up to £1 million to address the impact on reserves. The outturn as reported in the draft statement of accounts, after year-end transactions, is an overspending of £0.211 million resulting in the general fund non-earmarked reserves at the end of 2006/07 totalling £2.9 million.

18 Financial planning is improving but is not yet robust. Financial documents are difficult to interpret and the Council has not been focused in providing clear evidence to support its claims of improvement in financial monitoring and planning. It is difficult to see at a glance where efficiencies have been made or how implementation has taken place. There is no single detailed, agreed, robust project plan in place for the delivery of budget reductions and efficiency savings with clear financial targets, timelines and accountabilities. This information is contained in a number of documents, spreadsheets and cabinet reports and is difficult to extract.

19 There are clear arrangements in place to monitor the 2007/08 budget. The first report, due in May, was delayed due to lack of capacity and a strategic decision to use available financial capacity to close down 2006/07 accounts. However, the first budget monitoring report was reported to Cabinet on 2 July covering the first two financial monitoring periods of April and May. There is evidence that timely corrective action is being taken to address problem areas.

20 Better financial controls are having an impact on unbudgeted spending. Decisions that have financial implications not included in the budget now require agreement by the Section 151 Officer and the Council's Monitoring Officer as well as the portfolio holder. Standing orders have also been rewritten and consulted upon but not yet agreed by Council or fully implemented. Improved procedures for agreeing expenditure should further improve financial controls.

21 Plans are in place to improve budget monitoring further so that reports can be prepared at departmental management team level as well as for individual budget managers. This will enable Directors to have a better overview of spending within their departments.

R2 Managerial leadership

22   The Council has taken steps to ensure that it has effective managerial leadership. A review of senior management is currently under way aimed at ensuring the Council's senior managers have the necessary leadership capacity, skills and expertise. This review is being carried out by the Interim Chief Executive with external support and moderation and will be completed shortly.

23   A clear plan is in place for the recruitment to the Chief Executive's post. Arrangements have included significant involvement of stakeholders and partners. An Appointments Committee has been established and arrangements for selection and interviews have been finalised. A permanent Chief Executive is expected to be in post in October 2007.

24   Lines of accountability and responsibility are now much clearer to staff and managers. A new Management Board has been established to replace the previous rather large and unwieldy group. Minutes are taken and actions noted separately. These are reported and progress is tracked regularly. There is some evidence that this is having an impact and a more strategic focus is beginning to emerge.

25   The Council's Corporate Plan is not sufficiently robust to deliver sustainable improvements in services. The Council has produced a revised Corporate Plan covering the period 2007 to 2011 which was agreed on 28 June 2007. The Plan is based on what local people have said is important and sets out clearly the local context. It sets out how the Council will aim to deliver its part of the community vision for Northampton and sets this into the strategic context of other partnership activity such as work with the Local Strategic Partnership to contribute to delivery of the county-wide Local Area Agreement and delivering on the growth agenda in partnership with West Northamptonshire Development Corporation. However, whilst there are targets for 2007/08 these are not outcome focused, not prioritised and generally not quantified. For example the first priority is to improve the quality of the environment in which residents of Northampton live. The key action is to help local people feel safer and the measure is to reduce anti social behaviour and crime by March 2008. The plan does not identify the base line or the actual targeted reductions. This means that neither the Council nor local people will be able to measure the extent of improvement or achievement against this priority.

26   Service planning is not sufficiently robust to deliver sustainable improvements in services. Whilst service plans have been produced to agreed timescales, they are of variable quality. Value for money profiles have now been included and targets have been set to improve efficiency. Portfolio holders have not been engaged in the development of service plans and there are few links to strategic or policy development. Therefore their effectiveness in delivering the Council's overall policy priorities is limited. It is not clear how service plans are monitored or whether they are driving service improvement.

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R3 Management and capacity in finance

27   The Council has taken swift action to address weaknesses in the management and capacity of its finance function. Recruitment to key posts in finance is now largely complete and the Council has been able to recruit strong professionals into key posts. This has enabled the Council to finalise the 2006/07 accounts on time and to produce the first budget monitoring report for the July cabinet.

28   The Council has put in place a robust strategy for addressing any under performance in the finance section. A competency review is underway. All finance staff will go through an assessment centre and learning and development targets will be agreed with each individual. Progress will be measured through the performance management system. This provides a clear framework for addressing competency issues.

R5 Improvements in service delivery

29   Service improvement plans for the three weakest service areas of Housing, Planning and Benefits are generally of a better quality than their counterpart service plans. However, links between the two are not always explicit and it is not clear how the two are used in tandem to drive service improvement.

30   The Council has made some improvements to performance monitoring. The frequency of performance reviews has been increased and new weekly performance meetings mean that dips in performance can be addressed more quickly. Lines of managerial accountability are becoming clearer but there is recognition within Housing and Planning services of a need for greater professional support and service leadership. This is being addressed through restructuring of the two services.

31   Performance trends are largely positive. However, there are dips in performance in the most recent report (May 2007) for some performance indicators which are not well explained by the explanatory notes. This limits the effectiveness of any challenge by councillors or the Management Board.

R7 Sharing recommendations of progress assessment

32   The Council has circulated the February 2007 Progress Assessment report widely within the Council. It was published on the Council's website on the day of publication and shared with the former improvement panel which included external representation.

33   The Progress Assessment report was formally accepted by the newly-elected Cabinet on 5 June 2007.

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Appendix 1 – Proposals for assessing progress in 2007

1   The Relationship Manager set out the following expectations of progress that could reasonably have been expected by June 2007 in a letter to the Council dated 30 March 2007.

2   The purpose of this document is to set out the AC's proposals for assessing the Council's progress in 2007/08 and the minimum expectations of progress in the key areas identified in the Progress Assessment recommendations (Appendix 1).

3   The Commission will assess the Council's progress in 2007/08 in June 2007 and again in undertaking the Direction of Travel assessment.

- The June assessment will mainly consist of checking that the Council is achieving progress in implementing the recommendations of the 2006 Progress assessment. This will as far as possible be completed by normal RM activity in monitoring the Council's actions, in close liaison with the Council's auditors, KPMG. Any necessary 'on site' activity will be kept to a minimum. The out put will be a short report, not for publication but shared with the Council and GMB members.

- The Direction of Travel assessment will be undertaken at the same time as those for all other district councils. For NBC this will involve from three to seven days on site activity by one or two inspectors. The exact scope will be determined nearer the time of delivery. The assessment will include checking progress since the 2007 Progress Assessment (updated for the June 2007 review) and will specifically focus on action taken against the recommendations in that Progress Assessment. The output will be a report which will be made public in the Council's A&IL.

4   If the Commission's conclusion is that the Council is not achieving adequate progress against its duty of continuous improvement (under Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999), in either of the assessments listed above, it will consider what further action might be appropriate. In serious cases of failure to improve one of the options available to the Commission is to make a referral to the Secretary of State under section 13 of the 1999 Act.

5   Other inspection activity in the course of 2007/08.

- We will check progress in improving the Council's housing services in the autumn 2007. This will involve three to five days on site work by a housing inspector. The assessment will inform and its findings reported through the Direction of Travel assessment. The output will be a report which will be available to the Council and GMB members, but will not be published.

- We plan to undertake a full inspection of the Council's waste and street scene services as part of our 2007/08 work with the Council. The date has yet to be negotiated with the Council. A full inspection report will be published in the normal way.

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- The inspection work set out above will be set out in the Audit and Inspection Plan 2007/08 together with the work planned by the Council's auditors KPMG.

- An inspection of the Council's community safety services was planned in 2006/07 and was to take place in August 2007. The inspection was delayed with the agreement of the Council to avoid overlap with Home Office improvement work. It has now been agreed that this will not take place in August 2007. The timing of the assessment will be kept under review by the Relationship Manager and the Interim Chief Executive and will be discussed further once the outcomes and recommendations of the Home Office's work are known.

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Appendix 2 - Minimum expectations of progress

6   The following sets out the Commission's minimum expectations against the recommendations included in the Progress Assessment. The dates (eg June 2007 or Direction of Travel) are the dates when we will be assessing whether progress has been made.

R1	**The Council must demonstrate stronger joint political leadership across all parties. The immediate priority for the strengthened leadership is to set a balanced budget for 2007/08 and ensure that this is delivered.**	
	A clear joint agreement, post the elections, for political co-operation to deliver improvement and agreed arrangements in place.	June 2007
	Co-operation is sustained and effective.	Direction of Travel March 2007
	A balanced budget for 2007/08 is set;	
	A detailed, agreed, robust, project plan in place for the delivery of the identified budget reductions and efficiency savings with clear (financial) targets, timelines and accountabilities. Implementation will be underway.	June 2007
	Clear arrangements in place for officer and member accountabilities for the delivery of the budget reductions and efficiency savings.	June 2007
	Arrangements in place - and being actioned – to monitor the 2007/08 budget to ensure that appropriate action is being taken to deliver the budget. This will include clear reporting arrangements. There will be evidence already, if necessary, of timely and effective corrective action.	June 2007
R2	**The Council must ensure that it has effective managerial leadership which is critical to delivering the substantial improvements that must be achieved.**	
	A clear plan, which the Council has started to implement, for how it is going to ensure its most senior managers have the necessary leadership capacity, skills and expertise including:	June 2007
	• A clear, timed plan for the recruitment of the Chief Executive's post, including how the Council will seek to ensure that it makes a sound appointment.	June 2007
	• The Acting Chief Executive to assess the capacity and skills of the paid service and identify gaps and agree plans to address them.	August 2007

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	• Evidence that actions agreed at SMT are actioned, reported back and have impact.	June 2007
	• Robust, SMART Corporate Plan and service plans for 2007/08 in place and in use.	June 2007
R3	**The Council must urgently address weaknesses in the management and capacity in the finance function.**	
	A clear recruitment and retention plan which is being actioned urgently, plus robust contingency and short-term plans to ensure the 2007/08 budget and financial management processes are not compromised.	June 2007
	Agreed strategy for dealing with any under-performance in the section and evidence that the activity is underway.	June 2007
R4	**The Council must strengthen its commitment to and engagement in strategic partnership working and co-operation with partners to develop joint delivery of services.**	
	Evidence of increased engagement and the reputation of the Council amongst its partners will have improved.	DoT
	Evidence of active collaboration and participation with partners to deliver some services jointly.	DoT
R5	**The Council must continue to make improvements in service delivery. In the short-term the focus should be on delivering sustained improvements in housing, planning and benefits services.**	
	Coherent, SMART improvement plans in place for the three services identified above.	June 2007
	Evidence of proactive performance monitoring and management processes for each service and clear lines of managerial accountability.	June 2007
	Housing services improving.	DoT
	Planning services improving.	DoT
	Benefits Pis show consistent improvement trend as evidenced by 2006/07 outturn data plus part-year data at time of DOT assessment	DoT
R6	**The Council must strengthen arrangements to secure the continuous improvement of services.**	
	Clear approach evident by 2008.	DoT
	Value for Money and VFM arrangements improving.	DoT

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R7	**The Council should take this report to an appropriate public committee meeting and share it with the Government Monitoring Board.** Taken place or scheduled. AC's Relationship Manager notified.	June 2007