

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 28 January 2014

PRESENT: Councillor Brian Sargeant (Chair); Councillors Tony Ansell, Capstick, Gowen, Larratt, Lynch, Mason, Subbarayan and Strachan

David Kennedy – Chief Executive
Francis Fernandes – Borough Secretary
Marion Goodman - Head of Customer and Cultural Services
Steve Tinkler, Head of Audit, LGSS
Julie Seddon - Director of Customers and Communities
Glen Hammons - Head of Corporate Finance
Phil Morrison – Assistant Head of Finance
Councillor Mary Markham, Cabinet Member – Housing
Councillor Alan Bottwood – Cabinet member - Finance
Steven Boyes – Director of Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning
Tracy Tiff – Scrutiny Officer
Nicola Brindley – Democratic Services Officer

OBSERVERS Brian Stevens
Ann Stevens
Mavis Wilmshurst
Phil Foster
Jenny Ryan
Barry Ryan
John Taylor
Derrick Simpson – Town Centre Manager
Steve Elsey – Head of Public Protection

SPEAKERS Alan Borrell

APOLOGIES: Councillor Ford and Councillor Patel

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 17th November 2013 and 2nd December 2013 were agreed as a true record.

2. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

Alan Borrell requested leave to address the Committee on agenda item 10a – report of Scrutiny Panel 1 – Improving the town’s parks. He confirmed that he represented and was the Deputy Chair of Friends of the Racecourse. There were only three parks mentioned in the documentation from Cabinet and there were a number of green spaces outside those parks which the town should be proud of. If there was a Management Committee which would run parallel with the Friends Groups then he considered it would be difficult to sustain as different people had different attitudes. There were a number of organisations in the town who were involved in the care of the parks and had reviewed the management of them. He considered it unnecessary to spend money on the management as very little would be gained.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

Councillor Tony Ansell declared an interest in item 10a as a member of Friends of Eastfield Park.

Councillor Joy Capstick declared an interest in Item 8 as a Board member of the WNDC.

Councillor Phil Larratt declared an interest in item 6 as a NCC Councillor and member of the LGSS

Councillor Strachan declared an interest in item 6 and item 10a as a NCC Councillor, member of the LGSS, and member of the Friends of the Racecourse and Delapre.

4. DRAFT BUDGET 2014-2019

Councillor Alan Bottwood addressed the Committee and presented the report. Glen Hammons, Head of Corporate Finance confirmed that there were three budget items identified on the report which were print review, car parks and Delapre Abbey restoration.

Print Review

Julie Seddon Director of Customers and Communities addressed the Committee and confirmed that they had reviewed the potential options to reconsider the way the print material was used as it was not as efficient as it could be. They had reviewed other Local Authorities' best practise and would consider if it was more cost effective to deliver in house or out source. She confirmed that in the summer of 2014 Northamptonshire County Council would retender their own contract and there would be an option to be included in this as well. Members would be kept informed.

In response to a question from Councillor Winston Strachan, Julie Seddon confirmed that they were confident that savings could be achieved by year 1 and year 2. This Committee was a good example of operating with less paper as there were only two copies of the agenda available at the meeting. There would be a mixed approach for electronic and paperless meetings which would provide a large amount of savings. At each stage there would be an Equality Impact Assessment so people would be able to have their say.

Car Parks

Julie Seddon confirmed that they recognised that there was a need for people to come into the town centre and the car park charges would have an impact on their budget and encourage people into the town centre. She confirmed that the Saturday before Christmas 2013 all of the car parks in the town centre were full and the town centre was thriving. The initiatives had an impact on people's behaviour.

In response to a question from Councillor Winston Strachan, Julie Seddon confirmed that the car park initiative was sustainable and had been built into the budget until 2019.

There was further discussion on lowering business rates and improving the appearance of the town centre.

Councillor Joy Capstick supported the car park initiative and suggested that park and ride be considered again to make the town centre more vibrant and less traffic.

Councillor Alan Bottwood confirmed that the park and ride initiative was not successful in

some areas of the country and he considered there were adequate car parks in the town.

Julie Seddon confirmed that Project Angel had not been considered in the report.

Delapre Abbey Restoration

Steven Boyes, Director of Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning confirmed that there was £5.6 million available for the restoration of Delapre Abbey which was made up from different sources which included ear marked reserves, heritage lottery fund and capital receipts. He confirmed that the works on the roof had started which was a six month program and the remaining work would commence in September.

Councillor Winston Strachan appreciated the work carried out so far.

The comments made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the above budget proposals would be appended to a report to Cabinet on 19 February 2014.

AGREED: That the report be noted.

5. LOCAL GOVERNMENT SHARED SERVICES (LGSS)

David Kennedy, Chief Executive presented the report and confirmed that it showed an increase in the performance position. They had been working on issues and while most of them had improved one of them was still flagged as red. He confirmed that there would be a direct saving in the budget this year.

In response to a question from Councillor Winston Strachan, David Kennedy confirmed that in the first quarter was 27 days and was now under 22 days but the target was 19 days. There had been staffing issues at the beginning of the year and rule changes which meant that more information was required by the claimants that had contributed to the delay. There had been a 25% improvement and they were working to move it out of the red.

Marion Goodman, Head of Customer and Cultural Services confirmed that she had met with LGSS and had worked closely with the impact on customers and there had not been an increase with enquiries. They were within the guaranteed target of 28 days although their aim was for 19 days.

David Kennedy confirmed that it should be achievable under 21 days but one of the issues were that welfare and benefit claims had become more complicated for staff and customers. More people would be claiming universal credit in a few years time.

Councillor Lee Mason welcomed the report and looked forward to an update after the next quarter.

AGREED: That the report be noted.

6. NBC OWNED STREET LIGHTING

Councillor Mary Markham addressed the Committee and confirmed that there had been confusion over the ownership of street lighting and work would start in April to provide an inventory of what lights the Council owned. This would be done by an estate walkabout with maps and references. It would be completed in June where she would report their findings to the Committee.

Councillor Phil Larratt welcomed the report and confirmed that the lights which were switched off by the County Council which were Borough owned needed to be switched back on. He was pleased that there would be an inventory as the public needed to know who to report any damage to. The next step of the investigation would be the financial issues of the energy bills.

In response to a question from Councillor Brian Sargeant, Councillor Mary Markham would review what type of bulbs were going into the lampposts on the new estates.

The Committee welcomed the report and looked forward to hearing the findings.

AGREED: That the report be noted and a further update be brought to the June meeting of the Committee.

7. WEST NORTHANTS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (WNDC)

Steven Boyes, Director of Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning addressed the Committee and provided an update on the transition from WNDC to Northampton Borough Council and Northampton County Council. They had reviewed assets, liabilities and the value of which continued to progress.

Northampton Borough Council would take possession of St Peters Waterside and the Avon Nunn Mills site. All compulsory purchase orders had to be completed before the development commenced in March and the Borough and County Council had to be up to speed on matters for hand over as some projects continued past March 2014.

Councillor Joy Capstick confirmed that at the WNDC meeting they had confirmed difficulties had been overcome and they considered the project was on track. The town needed offices, businesses and housing to regenerate the town centre.

In response to a question from Councillor Winston Strachan, Steven Boyes confirmed that Network Rail owned most of the land at the railway station and there was only one lift.

Councillor Phil Larratt confirmed that Network Rail had been invited to the next Disabled People's Forum meeting with regard to the wheelchair access to the station and level access to the ticket office. They had to build for the future and have scope to expand.

AGREED That the report be noted.

8. PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

It was agreed that missed bin collections and graffiti would be considered for future scrutiny from the Performance Monitoring Report at the next meeting of the Committee:

ESC02 missed bins corrected within 24 hrs of notification

ESC04 household waste recycled and composted

ESC07 Land and highways assessed falling below acceptable levels - graffiti

9. SCRUTINY PANELS

9.A SCRUTINY PANEL 1 - IMPROVING THE TOWN'S PARKS

Councillor Elizabeth Gowen presented the report and confirmed that they now had information from the site visits but needed to promote the town's parks more. The Friends Groups did a lot of good work of a high standard although there were concerns over the

management committees and how and who would organise them.

The first recommendation was greater communication with the Council and Friends groups for people who wanted to book events in the parks. The second was to support the Park Rangers and make them more visible and contactable. They had reviewed the pocket parks although it was suggested that they would concentrate on the bigger ones.

Councillor Phil Larratt suggested that the following recommended be updated as it referred to both the Highways Agency and the Highways Authority:

“The Highways Agency and **the Highways Authority** is asked to update its brown tourist signage that details points of interest across the town; specifically ensuring that signage for the town’s parks is clear.”

AGREED: That the report be approved and presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 12 March 2014.

9.B SCRUTINY PANEL 1 - IMPACT OF THE WELFARE REFORM ACT

Councillor Lee Mason presented the report and confirmed that the scope had been agreed and requested support from Overview and Scrutiny.

AGREED: That the Scope of the Review be agreed and noted.

10. SCRUTINY PANEL 2 - MANAGEMENT AND REGULATION OF PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING (INCLUDING HIMOS)

Councillor Joy Capstick presented the report and confirmed that evidence would be reviewed at the next meeting on the 13th February 2014 and a draft report would be presented to Committee thereafter.

AGREED: That the report be noted.

11. POTENTIAL FUTURE PRE DECISION SCRUTINY

It was agreed that the Nene Meadows Supplementary Planning Document be considered for pre scrutiny and the relevant request would be made.

12. URGENT ITEMS

There were none.

The meeting concluded at Time Not Specified