

Northampton Borough Council

Corporate Plan Proposals for Northampton – 2008/2011

Results

Contents

1.0 INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Northampton Borough Council is committed to working with local people to improve the services that it provides and to deliver them in the most efficient way. One of the Council's priorities is to improve the interaction with the public and to listen to local people and provide services they need. In that spirit, the Corporate Plan consultation process for setting the priorities for 2008/2011 has been more wide reaching than in previous years. We will learn from our experiences this year and continue to improve our consultation techniques and how we use this information year on year.

AIMS OF THE EXERCISE

- 1.2 The aim of this consultation exercise is to build upon the initial consultation undertaken in November 2007 where a number of focus groups were held. Their purpose was to revisit and validate the current Corporate Plan's priorities and to provide a basis on which to develop a draft Corporate Plan for 2008-2011.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

- 2.1 The methods used to capture views included:
- A detailed draft plan, with a questionnaire attached,
 - Workshops for the original focus groups, such as Citizen's Panel, Tenants, business community, voluntary sector, Neighbourhood Partnership 8, Representatives from the Community Forums and the Youth Forum.
 - Open public meetings,
 - Key stakeholder and partners
 - Detailed draft Corporate Plan left in public locations across Northampton (libraries, supermarkets, community centres, post offices, council receptions, police stations).
- 2.2 There are many methods of conducting research and in this instance, this consultation exercise was conducted using sampling methods and therefore the results do not statistically represent the views of the population of Northampton. However, given the nature of the Corporate Plan proposals and the number of responses, whilst the results may not be

statistically significant they are indicative of the views of the people and organisations of Northampton and provide a flavour of their feelings regarding the proposals.

WHAT DID WE DO?

2.3 The following groups of people were included within the process:

- **General public**
- **NBC employees**
- **Business Community**
- **Local strategic Partnership**
- **Key partners including Northamptonshire County Council, Northants Police, WNDC, etc**
- **Area Partnerships and Community Forums**
- **Including 160 Voluntary Sector organisations**
- **Community Forums**
- **Tenants and Residents Associations**
- **Citizens Panel**
- **NBC Employees**
- **Faith Groups**
- **Neighbourhood Partnerships**
- **NBC Overview and Scrutiny**

2.4 The detailed draft Corporate Plan was left in the following public locations

- **Community Centres**
- **Post Offices**
- **Supermarkets**
- **Public Libraries**
- **Children's Centres**
- **Medical Centres**
- **Northampton Borough Council reception areas**
- **Northamptonshire County Council reception areas**

- **Police Stations**
- **Northampton Borough Council web site**

- 2.5 The draft Corporate Plan with an enclosed questionnaire was developed based around proposing five strategic priorities agreed by our partner organisations and developing new ways of working within the Council.
- 2.6 The draft Corporate Plan with an enclosed questionnaire were available to download and complete on-line via the Council's web site and intranet. An e-mail address, freepost address and consultation phone line were set up to receive comments/views etc.
- 2.7 The workshops, open meetings and staff briefings were designed to present the draft Corporate Plan and to note views, comments and questions.
- 2.8 In total the above approach included in excess of 1,000 contacts excluding NBC staff.
- 2.9 A copy of the draft Corporate Plan, the detailed consultation programme and a breakdown of the numbers of locations and contacts made via e-mail and mail-shot etc are available by contacting (01604) 838569.
- 2.10 The consultation exercise was well advertised through the media. Including adverts and press releases.
- 2.11 The results from the questionnaire have produced quantitative and qualitative data. The results from both the quantitative and qualitative data are detailed within this report.

WHAT RESPONSE DID WE GET?

- 2.12 The following meetings were held and responses made:
- Approximately **22** local people attended the public open meetings
 - Approximately **44** people attended the workshops
 - **41** completed questionnaires
 - **11** comments made via letter, phone call and e mail

3 KEY FINDINGS

3.1 The results and findings from the consultation exercise presented in two sections:

1. Results from the questionnaire, and
2. What people had to say

RESULTS FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRES:

3.2 The results from the questionnaires are collated in the following ways. **It must be noted that when considering the number of responses below that not every person complete the entire questionnaire and some people also chose more than one option to tick and therefore the total responses do not match the total number of people responding.**

- Those in support of the priorities, and
- Is there anything missing from the priorities, and
- Considering the priorities, which are the most important to people

Question 1: Do you agree with the priorities?

3.3 We asked people did they agree with the five strategic priorities

3.4 The following table shows the numbers responded from a total of 41 completed questionnaires, with two neither agreeing or disagreeing.

| Yes | No |
|-----|----|
| 39 | 0 |

Question 2: Is there anything missing from the above priorities?

3.5 We asked people to comment

3.6 The following table shows the responses from 41 completed questionnaires, and the numbers responded. Not all 41 questionnaires contained comments

| Comments | No |
|--|-----------------|
| Have a meaningful Public Transport Policy | 1 |
| Consult the public more | 3 |
| Just do it | 3 |
| Improve efficiency of NBC as an organisation | 1 |
| Page 7 priority 4 – quality section – an overt link needs to be made with SSNP | 1 |
| Commitment to community cohesion and develop mixed and welcoming town | 2 |
| Faith buildings to be more inclusive | 1 |
| Relationship of NBC and NCC to be clear | 2 |
| Explain jargon, terms and acronyms | 3 |
| Make links to equality schemes | 1 |
| A section to include what NBC expects of it's residents | 1 |
| Forms available in Polish | 1 |
| Cultural and diverse communities | 2 |
| Ask Government for more money instead of tax payer to deliver these | 1 |
| Work more with Voluntary Sector | 2 |
| Needs to be more specific , so we can understand | 9 |
| Needs to relate to Northampton, it could be anywhere | 9 |
| Needs a commitment from Housing to deliver plans and release land holding | 1 partner |
| Corporate Plan does not relate to Housing Strategy or individual service plans | HSG Strategy |
| Corporate Plan and budget needs to be linked together | Vol Sec |

People who sent in letters and attended workshops and open meetings also commented as follows:

- People would not disagree with the five priorities, however the language used is not clear and needs some explanation of what we really mean. I.e What does Cleaner, greener mean?
- People wanted to see specifics details about how this corporate plan effects them rather than strategically
- Not written to the audience we have consulted
- Questions were difficult to answer as people did not know what the detail is
- People are clearly sceptical and cynical about NBC plans
- People were concerned that this could have been written for any town, and not specific to Northampton
- Good starting point, however, people do not believe anymore. People want quick wins to inspire confidence
- We are trying to do too much and therefore are unable to deliver, we are spread too thinly
- People were expecting more, this is written like a mission statement rather than a business plan
- All aims and no objectives
- Too many consultants - use our own competent staff and managers
- Corporate Plan and Budget needs to be linked, where is budget proposals to support this activity? It is missing in Budget consultation
- More recognition to be made by key partner organisations which help NBC achieve it's aims and objectives
- How is the Corporate Plan consultation results going to be fed back to citizens?
- The plan does not deliver a picture of the long term direction of the council
- There are insufficient targets set against the priorities and aims.
- There is no mention of the desire for NBC to become a unitary authority
- Why is there annual consultation on a long term plan?

Question 3: From the five strategic priorities, which is the most important

3.7 We asked people to consider the five strategic priorities and to indicate which is the most important to them

| Question | No |
|--|-----------|
| A. We will work to help communities become Safer, greener and cleaner | 10 |
| B. We will improve housing and health to enhance the wellbeing of our communities | 7 |
| C. We will be a well managed organisation that puts our customers at the heart of what we do | 7 |
| D. We will promote economic development and growth in Northampton | 5 |
| E. We will strengthen our commitment to partnership working and engaging with our communities to deliver better outcomes | 7 |

3.8 People also said:

- What does Cleaner, greener mean?
- What do we mean by community? Define community
- What do we mean by partnership working?
- If we are already doing these things now and cannot do them efficiently, then why ask?
- Listen to the residents and staff on the ground, then you would know what to do
- Reference Cleaner, Safer, Greener, omits support to the creation and maintenance of green infrastructure and open spaces
- Reference to improve housing and health needs to reference the need to improve access and participation to cultural and leisure activity
- Links must be made to Town Centre Strategic Board, of which NBC is a member to promote economic development and growth in Northampton

Question 4: Which is the most important to you: Part A

3.9 We asked people under each priority, from a number of aims to indicate for each section, which is the most important to you.

| A. We will help our communities become safer, greener and cleaner, we will: | No |
|--|-----------|
| 1. Work through the Safer, Stronger, Partnership to reduce crime in the town | 25 |
| 2. Improve recycling rates across the town | 5 |
| 3. Reduce the Council's Carbon Footprint | 2 |
| 4. Support improvements in air quality | 0 |
| 5. Maintain a high standard of refuse collection and street cleaning | 6 |

3.10 People also said:

- Want weekly refuse collections to achieve this objective
- What is the Safer, Stronger, Partnership? Another brand, yet we are not told about it!

Question 4: Which is the most important to you: Part B

3.11 We asked people under each priority, from a number of aims to indicate for each section, which is the most important to you.

| B. We will improve housing and health to enhance the wellbeing of our communities, we will: | No |
|--|-----------|
| 1. Work towards achieving a Decent Homes Standard at the earliest opportunity | 10 |
| 2. Deliver additional affordable housing through the requirements of housing strategy | 12 |
| 3. Reduce homelessness in the town | 3 |
| 4. Reduce fuel poverty | 1 |
| 5. Introduce choice based lettings | 1 |
| 6. Share best practice on improving health and safety in the business community | 5 |
| 7. Establish a prioritised programme for neighbourhood renewal working with partners and communities | 8 |
| 8. Improve participation and access to sport | 3 |

3.12 People also said:

- What is the definition of affordable housing?
- Define homeless? People concerned about helping 'genuine' homeless
- Decent or affordable housing will not last for long if we do not invest in the outdoor environment, i.e, pathways, roads, pavements, etc.
- Are we neighbourhood renewal?, neighbourhood management?, please be clear on what we mean
- Define community
- The previous Corporate Plan contained a target of Decent Homes Standard by 2010, this has been changed to 'Earliest opportunity', why has the target been changed?
- Reduce homeless, however, budget proposals suggest we remove street drinker post, this is contradictory
- Point 1, should read, 'Work towards achieving Decent Homes Standard in both private and public sectors

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- Point 2, should read, 'Deliver additional affordable housing in accordance with the Housing Strategy
- Point 6, we don't think this is an appropriate and needs to be removed
- Point 7, Promote a prioritised programme for neighbourhood renewal working with partners to develop sustainable communities
- Point 8, links to budget is contradictory as the proposals are to increase leisure charges. How is access to sport and participation going to be financed?
- Voluntary Sector forum already help NBC achieve it's priorities, for example to meet the decent home standard, and the forum would like to see further recognition of this partnership work in NBC documents and within it's budget.

Question 4: Which is the most important to you: Part C

3.13 We asked people under each priority, from a number of aims to indicate for each section, which is the most important to you.

| C. We will be a well-managed organisation that puts our customers at the heart of what we do, we will: | No |
|---|-----------|
| 1. Ensure that all of our customers have access to our services | 4 |
| 2. Involve our customers in the design and delivery of our services | 3 |
| 3. Strengthen our system for learning and improving through customer feedback | 4 |
| 4. Improve customer care | 2 |
| 5. Organise the council to make it fit for purpose | 17 |
| 6. Support our staff so that they have all the key skills they need to do their jobs and develop their roles | 4 |
| 7. Improve the way we make decisions | 4 |
| 8. Improve our finances in order to optimise the use of our resources | 3 |

3.14 People also said:

- Local partners and local businesses should be included as one and the same to achieve outcomes
- We need enterprise zones to attract shops to the town centre
- People are upset that our buses and notice boards promote Milton Keynes
- People are confused about the 'term' cultural, people think that we mean ethnicity
- If we improve the town centre and attract families, then a busy town is a self policing town

Question 4: Which is the most important to you: Part D

3.15 We asked people under each priority, from a number of aims to indicate for each section, which is the most important to you.

| D. We will promote economic development and growth in Northampton, we will: | No |
|--|-----------|
| 1. Work with external partners to improve the vitality of the town centre | 9 |
| 2. Work with local businesses to improve the operation of the town centre | 12 |
| 3. Promote the town centre as a destination for shopping, leisure and relaxation | 7 |
| 4. Provide events that put Northampton on the map to improve the reputation and profile of Northampton | 3 |
| 5. Implement the highest priority actions within the Economic Strategy | 3 |
| 6. Facilitate the delivery of a number a cultural events | 2 |
| 7. Work with partners to improve education and skills attainment to support the economic regeneration | 3 |
| 8. Optimise the use of inward investment | 3 |

3.16 People also said:

- Community engagement strategy – how do we get ordinary people involved?
- Use the media more to our advantage, sell the good news
- People are concerned about the growth agenda, and what this means to them as an individual
- If we have all these services, then we must have a budget to deliver on it
- Budget is always in conflict with service delivery
- Needs to make reference to the growth agenda

Question 4: Which is the most important to you: Part E

3.17 We asked people under each priority, from a number of aims to indicate for each section, which is the most important to you.

| E. We will strengthen our commitment to partnership working and engaging with our communities to deliver better outcomes, we will: | No |
|---|-----------|
| 1. Deliver the community engagement strategy | 0 |
| 2. Regularly consult with local people on issues that affect their lives | 12 |
| 3. Develop and deliver services with a more local focus | 3 |
| 4. Work with partners to improve activities for young people | 7 |
| 5. Improve access to public services through joint working | 5 |
| 6. Take a leading role in the Local Strategic Partnership and the implementation of our Sustainable Communities Strategy | 0 |
| 7. Work with key partners on the planning and delivery of the government's growth agenda | 2 |
| 8. Engaging partners and communities in shaping Northampton as a place | 10 |

3.18 People also said:

- Stop using and paying too much for external consultants
- Employ competent staff or train staff and managers to do consultation
- Our consultation is passive rather than active
- Learn from Neighbourhood Management and CASPAR projects

4 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

4.1 The three open meetings for the public were held at the Guildhall on 14th, 17th and 21st of January 2008.

4.2 The main comments and concerns are:

- Consultation process too quick and not allowing long enough for consultation
- The Corporate Plan is not Northampton specific
- Language and terminology is not in layman's language
- It is not specific enough
- So what? It does not say anything!
- A good start and good to see

5 EQUALITIES

5.1 From its inception the consultation process was designed to make sure that it was accessible to all local people, businesses, partners of the Council and the voluntary community (The third sector). The methods and groups of people included in the consultation plan are available upon request by contacting (01604) 838569. An Equality Impact Assessment was made on the consultation process.

5.2 Cabinet will consider the results of this consultation process in making an informed decision regarding the final draft Corporate Plan which is due to be presented to Cabinet on the 28th of February 2008..

6 LESSONS TO BE LEARNT

6.1 During the consultation process a number of comments were made about the way in which this exercise has been undertaken. In summary they are:

- The language used needs to be clear, we assume people know what we mean
- Why do we consult in office hours at the Guildhall, why not come into our area like CASPAR and Neighbourhood Management and Area Partnerships do
- People need more time to consult properly, they feel this has been rushed
- Our consultation process is passive rather than active
- A clear brief to staff members on what to expect of them to undertake this exercise properly
- Future processes need to include a time for submission of comments etc on the closing date

Report authors: Denise King and Simone Wade
Policy and Governance
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