

**Council
Monday 12th May 2008**

Portfolio Holder Presentations

1. Report of the Leader of the Council, Portfolio Holder for Partnerships and Improvement (Page 1)
2. Report of the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement & Safety (Page 3)
3. Report of the Portfolio Holder for Housing (Page 6)
4. Report of the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration (Page 8)
5. Report of the Portfolio Holder for Environment (Page 9)
6. Report of the Portfolio Holder for Performance (Page 11)
7. Report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance (Page 14)

Council
Monday 12th May 2008

**Report of the Leader of the Council,
Portfolio Holder for Partnerships and Improvement**

Improvement

At the Government Monitoring Board (GMB) meeting on 10 April 2008 our Lead Official commented that the much greater clarity and focus of our plans and reports gave him confidence that Northampton Borough Council was now improving strongly.

At the meeting the GMB agreed to wind up the Leisure and Culture Sub-Board and to end engagement with the Leisure and Culture Departments of the Council.

At the same meeting the GMB agreed to wind up Finance Sub-Board following the very significant improvements in our financial management over the past 12 months. This represents disengagement with the Finance service, but reports on the Council's overall financial management will still be required at GMB meetings as part of the corporate overview given by the Leader and the Chief Executive, with the Director of Finance.

Staff in both departments have been thanked for their hard work in improving their services.

Of the five sub-boards set up by the GMB only two are now operating – Planning and Housing. We anticipate that, if current performance is maintained, the Planning sub-board will recommend that it be wound up later in the year. A decision on the Housing sub-board will depend on the results of the Housing Progress Assessment in May and on significant further improvement within the Housing Service.

The Revenues & Benefits Teams and their colleagues enjoyed a lunch party in the Great Hall on 11 April 2008 to celebrate the end of their engagement by the GMB earlier in the year.

Inspections

The results of our Direction of Travel inspection were presented to Cabinet on 7 April 2008 as part of the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter from the Audit Commission.

Overall the report was presented by the Audit Commission as positive. Improvements in political and strategic leadership and in partnership working were praised. Inspectors raised a number of ongoing concerns which are being addressed. Value for Money (VfM) was judged adequate but our approach to VfM remains weak. Concerns were expressed about

- Capacity within our Human Resources function.
- Potential capacity problems resulting from any management restructure.

- Perceived failure to learn from interim managers and directors and to retain that learning within the organisation.

Our rate of improvement was judged to be average, based on data from 2006/7. However, we start from the back of the field so need to significantly improve on this if we are to achieve the stated ambition of being amongst the best performing councils within five years. Comparative data for 2007/8 will be available towards the end of 2008.

The report of the Streetscene, Waste Management and Sustainability inspection held in March 2008 is to be published in June 2008.

The Inspector for the Housing Progress Assessment will be on site from 6 to 16 May 2008.

Management Restructure

The Chief Executive issued a consultation document for the structure of the Council's management below Director level on 17 March 2008. The period for consultation ended on 18 April 2008. This document fleshed out the proposals already trailed in the report on proposals for the Director level agreed by Cabinet on 28 January 2008 and reported to Council in my report on 17 March 2008. It proposes for consultation the establishment of a structure based on Heads of Service rather than Corporate Managers, and proposes to redistribute and increase management capacity to focus on the Council's priorities and on key improvement areas, such as Planning and Housing.

A report will be brought to Cabinet on 6 May 2008 and a verbal update will be provided at Council on 12 May.

It is critical that the Council has the management capacity to deliver on its improvement journey and to make the changes needed to achieve our ambition to be amongst the best Councils by 2013.

WNDC

Cllr Church and I attended our first WNDC Board meeting on 22 April 2008. The most important item discussed were the proposals for a tariff to replace the current Section 106 agreements negotiated with developers on a site-by-site basis. The tariff proposals will now be consulted on with the public and with developers.

Tony Woods
29 April 2008

Council
Monday 12th May 2008

**Report of the Portfolio Holder for
Community Engagement & Safety**

Crime

The final figures for 2007-8 show a generally positive picture on crime levels in the Borough – which means that there is less chance of our citizens becoming a victim of crime than a year ago. Our overall measure shows 1675 fewer crimes over the year, a 9% reduction. There were 18% fewer thefts of and from vehicles than in 2006-7, and robberies were down by 24%. However, for several types of crime Northampton still shows higher figures than many comparable areas, so the Safer Stronger Northampton Partnership needs to remain ambitious in tackling the causes of these problems. These figures are currently unaudited.

Anti-Social Behaviour

We know that anti-social behaviour is one of local people's biggest concerns. So it is good to see the continuing drop in the number of incidents being reported, a reflection of how neighbourhood teams are getting to grips with local issues. We need to know whether this reduction has been matched by an improvement in how people think about their areas, and whether they feel secure as well as actually being safer.

Safer Stronger Northampton Partnership

Staff from this Council and the Police and other agencies are to move in together to refurbished offices in Fish Street, as part of the strategy to ensure that the Safer Stronger Northampton Partnership is really working effectively. The Partnership's new strategy is approaching completion, based on identified local need balanced with wider concerns. It identifies clear outcomes and how they will be measured, with an action plan setting out who will be responsible and by when.

Venezia!

Our Venezia! Festival is now underway and contains an enormous range of activities to attract all ages and satisfy all the senses – opera, food, workshops, art, drama, photography, talks, film, wine, music, family fun and a masked ball.

Balloon Festival

Planning for this year's festival continues, using a comprehensive risk assessment approach. This identifies potential expenditure and income for a number of scenarios, and is helping to inform operational decisions. Meanwhile the councillor working party has been hearing evidence and

discussing the longer term future of the festival, with a view to reporting to Cabinet in July with recommendations.

Culture and Leisure

The sub-group of the Government Monitoring Board (GMB) set up to look at culture and leisure has now formally been wound up. The Government lead official for Northampton Borough Council's improvement wanted the group to drive forward better partnership working within the county, both to raise the profile of culture within our agencies and to raise this area's cultural profile in the region. He was clear that culture and leisure was not seen as a failing service in Northampton. Chaired by the Improvement and Development Agency's lead on cultural matters, the sub-group has overseen a co-ordinated improvement programme in Northamptonshire using the 'TAES' (Towards an Excellent Service) model. The Chair has commended this Council's team for their enthusiastic commitment to the programme both in Northampton and within the region. All the criteria for the group's work were met, and so the GMB has now agreed that its work is done – a really positive signal for this Council.

Customer Service Performance

Operational teams have been coping with additional demand from other services over the last 2 months – mainly billing from Council Tax, introduction of the Concessionary Travel Scheme and the Housing Register review in preparation to go live with Choice Based Lettings. In addition to this the team have implemented a 'queue management' system in the One Stop Shop. This is an example of where staff have used their initiative to find solutions to an issue and used available resources effectively. It has been an extremely busy period and staff have worked very hard to deliver timescales. The telephone service during the Council Tax main billing period was the best performance yet. Staff coped with 3.5 times the normal customer demand and average waiting time in the queue was approximately 1.30 minutes.

Complaints Management

Significant levels of Stage 1 complaints continue to be received with an increasing number of Stage 2 complaints also requested. Analysis of causal factors includes poor quality of responses in service areas, and failures to fully address the customer concerns raised in complaint. Training and support to key service areas has been undertaken by Customer Services working closely with Property Maintenance, Streetscene and Housing as priority areas.

An internal review of processes and outputs is being completed to ensure resources are effectively deployed to provide more effective support to key areas. A monthly report is presented to Management Board; a quarterly report will be presented to Cabinet with effect from June 2008. A report is currently being produced reporting for the period June 2007 – March 31st 2008. There is evidence of increased performance monitoring and management and challenge in service areas.

The Chief Executive's office is now responsible for co-ordinating responses to enquiries from Members of Parliament in order to enhance the relationship between the authority and MPs and the service provided to them on constituency matters.

Housing Progress Assessment

Key members of the team are involved in working closely with Housing Services and supporting work leading to the Housing Progress Assessment.

Call Care - Telecare Standards Accreditation (TSA) Audit

An audit inspection is planned for the 29th May to retain part 1 of TSA. Work has commenced to apply for part 2 TSA later this year.

Brendan Glynane
29 April 2008

Council
Monday 12th May 2008

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Housing

Partnership Working

A recent bid to the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) for a hostel improvement grant has been successful. £1.4m has been allocated to Northampton as part of their 'Places for Change' programme. The aim of this programme is to create places that support people to make positive changes in their lives and move on to independent or more appropriate supported accommodation. This is a really important project for the town and we would like to thank CLG for supporting Northampton Borough Council's bid to modernise facilities for homeless and vulnerable people in the town. Feedback received from CLG is that our bid impressed and that we did very well given the number of alternative good bids they received.

Local Housing Allowance (LHA)

Changes to the way Housing Benefit is calculated were implemented nationally on 7 April 2008.

Housing Benefit helps tenants on low income and benefits to pay their rent. For those who rent their property in the private sector, the way their entitlement is calculated is changing. Only claimants new to benefits will be affected by the new rules.

Council staff have introduced these new rules efficiently and have worked with stakeholders to ensure that the new scheme is understood and take-up maximised.

Property Maintenance

As announced previously by the Leader of the Council, Property Maintenance transferred to my Portfolio from the Environment Portfolio on 25th March 2008.

The Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) Phase Two programme is well underway. A three-year draft Business Plan has been produced and consultation is ongoing with the Trade Unions in relation to remuneration issues.

A review has started into procurement issues within the section, several Procurement Consortia have been interviewed in relation to the services they can offer and the ones that can demonstrate value for money will be chosen as the preferred partners. This is being co-ordinated with the procurement partnership led by the Council's Finance Directorate.

In general the vast majority of the local performance indicators have seen a consistent improvement in particular the Voids team has seen their levels of performance exceed target times.

A new post of Business Support Team Leader is shortly to be filled which will harmonise the disparate administration function within the section.

Key issues

Housing Register review

- In preparation for the introduction of Choice Based Lettings in July, a comprehensive review of housing register applicants has commenced. This will ensure that data held on the Register is 100% accurate going into the new scheme and people on the Housing waiting list have the best possible opportunity to apply for available social housing.

Housing Progress Assessment

- The Housing Progress Assessment by the Audit Commission commences on 6th May. The Inspector will be around for 2 weeks and will be looking specifically at how well the service offers value for money, delivers services to diverse groups within the community and will also look at the level of customer focus within housing. We welcome this Assessment, which will give a clear indication of our direction of travel as we aspire to be a 3 star, excellent service by 2012.

Service Plan

- The Housing Service Plan for 08/09 is at any advanced stage of preparation. Some of the Housing service's key priorities for this next 12 months include that we will have: -
 - Secured the confidence of our service customers, our partners and the Audit Commission Housing Inspectors in our improvement journey.
 - Established a culture that supports high performance and is customer focused.
 - Delivered tangible improvements to value for money.

Service Awareness forum

A group of about 60 tenants attended this event on 22nd April aimed at improving awareness of the services provided by Housing. Staff from key areas gave short presentations to small groups followed by discussion. The event was hailed as a great success with positive and encouraging feedback from tenants and it is hoped to run these sessions on a regular basis in future.

The Big Picture

A number of events have been held to discuss future housing strategy, with the assistance of the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), and under the banner "The Big Picture". These are informing the improvement agenda and assisting officers in developing further plans for the future housing strategy of the Borough Council.

Sally Beardsworth
29 April 2008

Council
Monday 12th May 2008

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration

Grosvenor/Greyfriars

Negotiations with Legal and General for the redevelopment of the Grosvenor Centre and the Bus Station continue to make good progress. Both parties have now instructed their solicitors to draw up a legal agreement based upon agreed terms.

Economic Regeneration Strategy

Following public consultation, the Northampton Economic Regeneration Strategy has been agreed by Cabinet. We received useful input from a wide range of interests and our partners. In particular, the Local Strategic Partnership were supportive and will now share the strategy and the policies it contains as the basis for our shared work.

Regeneration of the town centre is at the heart of the document, with the need to provide a diverse range of retail and leisure facilities, specifically ensuring that we provide opportunities for new and specialist business. In addition, we need to promote high skilled employment opportunities, appropriate quality housing and to work with the University and others to provide a strong knowledge based economy.

Market Square

A report on the future use of the Market Square, and on building frontages in the Market Square and Abington Street, are planned to be considered by Cabinet in June.

These will provide the basis for our efforts to improve the use of the Market Square as hub of our town centre. In addition, we have commissioned reports on niche retail strategy and a feasibility study for a Business Start-Up Centre in the St. John's area. These will be considered, by Cabinet, when finalised.

RSL Management Partnership Agreement

On 29th April, the Leader, Housing Portfolio Holder and I attended the launch of a management partnership agreement signed by the Borough Council, Daventry and South Northamptonshire District Councils and selected Registered Social Landlords. The agreement sets out how we will together with RSL's to create high quality, affordable mixed tenure neighbourhoods that meet the needs of our expanding population.

Richard Church
29 April 2008

Council
Monday 12th May 2008

Draft Report of the Portfolio Holder for Environment

Street Scene

A new service level agreement has been entered into with ELVIS (The End of Life Vehicle Impound Scheme) for the removal of abandoned vehicles. This came into effect from the 1st April and provides more flexibility for the removal of vehicles using an extended number of removal contractors. This will result in improved performance and has been implemented at no additional cost to the Council.

The masterplan for Becketts Park has now commenced with HALCROW taking the lead on the work. Funding for the project has been provided through the regeneration team and the plan is expected to be completed by June this year.

Regeneration works to Becketts Park entrance and Midsummer Meadow river walk have now been completed which is the continuation of the Breathing Spaces Project. All regeneration works have now been completed at Victoria Park, including a maze, new MUGA (multi use games area), exercise equipment, children's play area and interpretation boards. This innovative and excellent scheme is due for official opening during May.

The Council is supporting "Bands in the Park" this year with at least 15 bands playing at Abington Park during the summer.

Waste Management

The trial kerbside collection of glass for recycling is popular with residents with high participation rates resulting in five tonnes of glass being collected and diverted from landfill on a weekly basis.

Work is continuing through the Northamptonshire Waste Partnership and Milton Keynes Council regarding future residual waste treatment. The Memorandum of Understanding and Outline Business Case has now been approved by all partners and at Cabinet on 28th April 2008

Changes to the Refuse Collection rounds are planned for the summer. This will provide for more efficient use of the vehicle fleet and delay the need for introduction of additional rounds to meet the needs of Northampton's growing population. Around 10,000 homes (247 streets and roads) will be affected with a change in collection day. All ward Councillors have been consulted on proposed changes. Work is in hand to ensure that changes are publicised to affected households.

Carbon Management Programme

Work has commenced to procure the service of Energy Management to implement the agreed first year investment programme, which will deliver the target Carbon Reductions and efficiency savings.

Stray Dogs Service

As part of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005, the Stray Dogs Service transferred to the Council on 6th April 2008. New arrangements have been put in place from 6th April and have been working well, providing a smooth transfer from the Police to Northampton Borough Council.

Property Maintenance

As announced by the Leader of the Council, Property Maintenance transferred from my portfolio to the Housing Portfolio on 25 March 2008 and is reported under the Housing Portfolio Holder's report.

Councillor Trini Crake
29 April 2008

Council
Monday 12th May 2008

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Performance

Induction Test for Hackney Drivers

To enhance the Service standards of Hackney Cab Drivers the Licensing section has introduced an Induction Course for new drivers. The one-day course will cover handling Crime and Disorder issues, Disabled Access issues, testing basic communication skills and knowledge of Northampton.

This course alongside the recent “flagging operations” checking on the correct application of hire rules by Private Hire Drivers are both designed to improve the standard of service received by the public supervised by the Borough’s as a Licensing authority.

Land Charges

Following the introduction of HIPs packs late last year the Council has responded to Government recent consultation on further developments on improving the Land Charges services offered by local councils.

The Borough provides a high standard of land search service and during 2007/08 provided 95.9% turnaround within 24 hours for standard local searches.

Election Services

The section has commenced forward planning for the 2009 County and European elections. Partnership working with other Districts Councils in the County on joint printing is being considered to improve VFM and a joint advertising campaign across the County to encourage Registration on the election register is planned.

The Council’s Electoral Services Manager’s experience has been recognised at a Regional level and he has been asked to Chair the East Midlands branch of the Association of Electoral Administrators.

Overall Performance

The performance report for March confirms the continuing improvement in monthly indicators with 55% of targets achieved and 77% of the indicators showing an improvement year-on-year. The quarterly indicators show 44% of the targets achieved and 36% showing year-on-year improvements.

These figures are currently unaudited. When the final out-turn is reported, including the annual indicators, consideration will be given to the frequency of reporting each indicator and adjustments made enable improvement in delivery of key customer services.

Absence Management

The March out turn of 12.10 days is slightly ahead of last year and failed to achieve the improvement target set for this year. Absence management is a key indicator of the capacity of the authority to deliver consistent services and therefore needs match the best Councils in the country. The action plan for 2008/09 will be revisited to ensure that appropriate support is provided to employees and the capacity of the Council to provide services to the public.

Best Value Performance Plan

The previous statutory requirement for an annual detailed BVPP has been removed by Government. There is only a requirement to prepare a condensed version following revised guidance from Government. This takes the form of reporting the out-turn for 2008/09 against our Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) to be submitted by 30th June. Targets for performance in 2008/9 are being set as part of the Corporate Plan and the Service Plans for all services. These plans will be made available to all Members when they are completed.

Preparation of the new set of National Indicators.

BVPIs are being replaced by a set of 198 indicators. The Council is working closely with other councils in the County to prepare for this new reporting framework. Agreement on which National Indicators will be included in the Local Area Agreement should be reached by 1st June 2008. Several of these Indicators will also be included in the final Corporate Plan. Communications on the details of the new set of indicators will take place in the coming period. As many of the new National Indicators are brand new and were not previously collected, 2008/9 data will provide a baseline for future target-setting.

New Performance Management System.

The implementation programme of Performance Plus is on target for the June pilot in Regeneration. Following this an evaluation of the project will be undertaken to inform the development of the further phased rollout across services. Arrangements have been made with the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny 3 for a presentation to be made to this Committee of the new system as part of communication to all Councillors.

Performance Management Framework.

This is being revised to build on the progress made over the last twelve months. The changes to achieve a more focussed approach include monthly reviews of each Director's area by the Chief Executive and monthly Performance Clinics in each Directorate and Quarterly Reviews for each Portfolio undertaken by the Leader with the Portfolio Holder advised by the Chief Executive.

Single Status & Equal Pay

The Council continues to work jointly with the Trade Unions to implement new pay and grading arrangements for the Council. Arrangements are being

made for a signing day during May when it is hoped the majority of the jointly identified potential equal pay claims will be settled.

The Chief Executive is continuing to review the options to implement Single Status across the Council. Progress on a new way forward is anticipated shortly.

Skills for Life

The Council has signed up to the GO local Government Award to promote Skills for Life across the organisation. A Steering Group has been established which will oversee the project and promote similar action by our partners in the LSP.

The Council will be working with Tresham College to promote Numeracy and Literacy skills with the staff and the general public during Adult Learning Week (19th to 23rd May).

Brian Hoare
29 April 2008

Council
Monday 12th May 2008

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance

General

This is a very busy time of the year for the finance department. The key focus is on the closure of accounts, which is now well under way.

Improvement

The Government Monitoring Board agreed that the Finance service should be taken out of monitoring. This is very good news for the Authority and is part of our ongoing improvement journey. I would like to express my thanks to the Finance staff for all of the work and effort they have put in.

Value for Money

As part of our value for money / efficiency process the Council went live in January on a single point of contact for agency worker services. The implementation went fairly smoothly and the first quarterly review with the supplier shows that we are delivering a data accuracy of 95% in terms of our internal control mechanisms. This compares very well against 40% accuracy for most local authorities generally. The project aims to deliver both financial and efficiency savings and this first review indicates that we are on our way.

Risk Management

Risk management workshops are currently being rolled out across the authority. So far over 80 staff have attended these workshops. This is part of our overall improvement in governance arrangements and to ensure that the evaluation of risk is embedded in all activities and services across the Council.

Asset Management

English Partnerships have agreed to dispose of a small area of land at nominal value to the Council to facilitate the completion of the ground lease at Mencap Delapre Park to Mencap for their New Headquarters.

Following a letter to the County Council outlining the problems in relation to the completion the lease of the site at Lings Way to Indian Hindu Welfare Organisation (IHWO), NCC have agreed to carry over the grant funding to the IHWO into this financial year. English Partnerships have also agreed to enter a deed of release removing restrictive covenants, which were delaying the project. It is therefore anticipated that legal formalities necessary to complete the lease can be completed in the near future.

Malcolm Mildren
29 April 2008