

**Council**  
**Monday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2008**

**Portfolio Holder Presentations**

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## **Council**

**Monday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2008**

### **Report of the Portfolio Holder for Partnerships & Improvement**

#### **Management Restructure**

Job evaluation has been completed and salary scales set for the Director and Head of Service posts and agreed with myself, the Leaders of the Opposition Groups and the Chair of General Purposes.

Formal offers have been accepted for:-

Director of Planning & Regeneration  
Director of Housing  
Head of Planning

David Bailey  
Lesley Wearing  
Susan Bridge

Further announcements will be made. Offers have been made for thirteen other posts. Seven further posts will be advertised shortly. Interim arrangements are being put in place to ensure cover for all posts when the new management structure comes into effect on 1 October 2008.

As anticipated, the new management team will comprise current Corporate Directors and Managers, promotions from our operational managers and external appointments.

I will be announcing some changes to Cabinet Portfolio responsibilities shortly to ensure a better match between the political and managerial leadership structures.

#### **Improvement**

There has been no Government Monitoring Board meeting since last Council. The next meeting is now scheduled for 16 October 2008.

The Audit Commission, will be conducting an 'Access to Services' inspection early next calendar year.

This will test a number of key aspects of the Council from our equalities performance through engagement to our 'customer focus'. It will be a very wide ranging inspection that will, potentially, encompass all our services.

We had hoped to apply for CPA re-grading before the government's deadline of 31 March 2009. The government wanted all councils graded as Poor in the 2004 round of CPA inspections – which includes Northampton Borough Council – to be rated above Poor before 31 March 2009.

However, the Audit Commission have made it clear that they will only consider performance information for the year 2006-07 in any re-grading inspection. This is so far out of date as to be meaningless and would mean that NBC would be most unlikely to be re-graded above Poor. We have, therefore, decided not to seek regarding.

However, we do need to have a clear benchmark as to our current position.

We have, therefore, commissioned the Improvement & Development Agency (IDeA) to undertake a Peer Review this autumn. This is something undertaken entirely voluntarily. There has been no pressure from the Government Monitoring Board or Lead Official to undertake this review. However, it is an important step in our improvement journey.

The IDeA team will be on site for 4 days commencing on 13 October. I am sure they will want to talk to a cross section of Councillors. This date will also allow the Review Team to observe a Government Monitoring Board meeting. This will be the first IDeA Peer Review since 2001.

I have recently read the report from that 2001 review. If the problems identified in that report had been acted upon, swiftly and effectively, Northampton Borough Council might well have avoided being classified as Poor in 2004 and so have avoided the torrid time we have experienced, over the past 4 years, in government 'engagement'.

Sadly, only now, some 7 years after that IDeA report, are we seriously, effectively tackling the problems of Northampton Borough Council.

### **Joint Strategic Planning Committee (JSPC)**

The statutory order was approved at the end of July establishing the JSPC.

Membership will be:-

Northampton BC	4 seats
Daventry DC	3 seats
South Northants DC	3 seats
Northamptonshire CC	2 seats

In addition there will be non voting observers from WNDC, Wellingborough BC and the Labour Party (to ensure all three parties are involved). Other observers may be appointed as required.

NBC will chair for the first 18 months.

The first meeting of the JSPC will be on 21 October 2008.

There have been concerns about the progress being made towards establishing a Local Development Framework. Progress has been slow, continues to slip and there are concerns raised about achieving the 'test of soundness'.

To address this the four Councils have commissioned (with GO-EM support) a review of the LDF process and the JPU's 'fitness for purpose' in supporting this.

I anticipate that the report will identify a resource shortfall in the JPU with a recommendation that significantly more and more senior people are employed.

This will have budget implications.

### **WNDC**

Council has asked for regular feedback from my activities as a member of the WNDC Board. There is, however, nothing substantive to report this time.

**Cllr Tony Woods**  
**September 2008**

# Council

Monday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2008

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

### 1. Community Safety

#### Safer Stronger Northampton Partnership (SSNP)

The co-located unit is now firmly established at Fish Street. An official launch will take place on the 11 September 2008. The combination of the Council and Police Community Safety services have provided the opportunity for new practices to be established to further develop partnership working. This will not only help in co-ordinating the work of our front line services, but also enable us to identify crime and disorder issues as and when they emerge, therefore giving the opportunity to provide support and intervention at an earlier stage.

#### Crime

Northampton continues to see a fall in overall crime with marked reductions in robbery and violent crime. Partnership working with the police through the SSNP, Neighbourhood Management and Joint Action Groups continues with various front line services taking an active role.

### 2. Culture and Leisure

#### Venezia!

The Venezia! Festival came to an end on 10<sup>th</sup> August. We are now evaluating the project. We will be setting up an opportunity for sponsors to give feedback on their experience of the event.

#### Museums

The museum has received a grant of £15,000 from the Designation Challenge Fund towards audience development work.

Be prepared to see the museum in Guildhall Road being covered in scaffolding in the next few weeks – not a piece of cutting edge contemporary art, but the start of work to repair a leaking roof and replace some of the ailing air-conditioning units.

#### Balloon Festival

The weather was kind to the Festival this year. The general consensus was that it was a successful event. Some traders are already requesting sites for next year. 41,000 paying visitors, together with a similar number of children attended this year. With the green light given for next year, the events team will begin planning next year's event now.

#### Events

The events team are working on a revised Events in Parks policy.

#### Leisure

Swimming attendances are up at Danes Camp.

Direct debits for gym membership are growing, but there has been a slight slow down probably due to the 'credit crunch', but the outlook is still optimistic.

There is a damp problem with the Sports Hall floor at Lings Forum. Work is underway and has to be completed by the end of September, when the centre hosts the National League Men's basketball

### **3. Customer Services Operations**

There is a time limited project One Stop Shop transformational group reviewing the existing use of the One Stop Shop, customer feedback, stakeholder requirements for the future to forward plan how existing accommodation is used, review resource and capacity for service delivery.

Customer Services staff have been working hard following the implementation of the Choice Based Lettings project. This has involved increased call volumes and customers into the One Stop Shop in the early stages as customers get used to the new allocations system. The numbers coming in have started to diminish and staff are reporting that advising customers on their housing application is a much more straight forward process.

The IT Governance Board have approved the procurement of a workforce management system called Q-max for the Contact Centre. The systems enables managers to make the most effective use of staffing resources to meet customer demand and free up staff time for training and development. The system will generate efficiency savings for the contact centre as well as ensuring we have the resources to meet the performance standards set.

A Customer Feedback Coordinator has been appointed to work with service areas on improving their processes on complaints. The Coordinator will be concentrating on improving reporting to service areas on complaints and working with service area resolvers on improving the quality of written responses.

#### **Support Services**

A Value for Money review indicated that the Royal Mail CleanMail Advance service could provide significant savings to NBC. Discussions are in progress to secure this deal to ensure an ongoing saving for the Council on essential costs.

Further savings will be possible in the Print Room by replacing an obsolete high volume copier with two newer machines for the same monthly lease fee. This has more than doubled the copying capacity of the unit.

#### **Call Care**

On the 29<sup>th</sup> May a full 3-year audit was conducted by Telecare Standards Association (TSA). Call Care passed this inspection and is accredited to the TSA Part 1 for calls handling. The inspector complimented staff on the quality of their pre-inspection submission. There were no "improvement notices" issued. Work is in progress to achieve Part 2 of the accreditation in the autumn of this year.

**Cllr Brendan Glynane**  
**September 2008**

## **Council**

**Monday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2008**

### **Report of the Portfolio Holder for Housing**

#### **4. Performance**

Choice Based Lettings (CBL) went live on 31<sup>st</sup> July as planned and three bidding cycles have already taken place. A great deal of hard work has been done by a significant number of staff in the last few months leading to the successful launch. CBL will give our customers on the waiting list more choice over where they live. A number of Housing Associations have now signed up to be part of the common housing register and will advertise their properties through our scheme. We are also working with South Northants Council on a joint CBL scheme.

The Housing service improvement plan for 2008-10 is currently in development with a series of workshops with staff being held. The plan will address the recommendations in the recent Audit Commission progress inspection report and will be a key document, identifying priority actions and outcomes for the next couple of years.

#### **5. Partnership Working**

Just over 100 people attended the recent Landlord's forum held in the Great Hall. Presentations were given on licensing, energy performance certificates and local housing allowances. Feedback was very positive and it is planned to hold this event on a quarterly basis in future.

Officers recently attended a research workshop organised by Communities and Local Government (CLG) in Milton Keynes designed to assist a common understanding of the care and support needs of communities within growth areas and to ensure that these needs can be accurately predicted and addressed.

#### **6. Key Issues**

- The restructure of the Housing Department below the Head of Service level is progressing following consultation with staff. It is hoped to implement the new structure from 1<sup>st</sup> October.
- The Benefit Service is recruiting to team leader vacancies. These posts are critical to the continued improvement in benefits performance and we expect to attract a number of high calibre candidates.

Housing Services have recently taken over responsibility for the management of Ecton Lane Gypsy and Traveller site.

A management agreement has been negotiated with one of the residents of the site and a housing officer has been allocated to work with both the manager and the residents to ensure liaison and monitoring arrangements are in place and work effectively. A service user group will be established to ensure issues are addressed quickly and to the satisfaction of all residents. These arrangements will ensure that the previous issues relating to Ecton Lane are not repeated.

**Cllr Sally Beardsworth**  
**September 2008**

**Council**  
**Monday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2008**

**Report of the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration**

**Market Square**

I am delighted to report that our plans for the market square have been well received by Northamptonshire Enterprises Ltd and we have been awarded a grant of £900,000 for a three year programme of improvements to the square. This is a vote of confidence in our proposals for our market square as the hub of our town centre.

Our aim is to create a versatile space for so more people to enjoy the fabulous place our Market Square is. A successful trading market is a key element, that is why we want to invest in promoting the market and looking at ways we can support and encourage new traders. The Market Square will be a place for entertainments and leisure as well as additional retail. A place to watch live British medal success at the 2012 Olympics, to enjoy a skating rink at Christmas, to enjoy an evening's music or experience the tastes and smells of a food festival whilst maintaining market trading. The cabinet has agreed to fund a full time events organiser who can help us make all of these things happen.

**Public Realm**

Once work in Gold St is completed, WNDC, The County Council and ourselves are looking at where the next phase of the public realm project should be. The Council are keen to see work in the Market Square and Abington St to raise the quality of the public environment in these key areas.

**Chrysalis Centre**

We have submitted a bid to the East Midlands Development Agency to secure capital funding for this major project to restore 36 Guildhall Rd as a business start up centre, where new entrepreneurs can have a town centre base to trade from. We expect to hear the outcome soon.

**St. Johns Masterplan**

We have launched the St. John Masterplan jointly with our colleagues in The County Council and WNDC. We have had a consultation event in the Guildhall for stakeholder in the area, focusing particularly on our plans for the area known as the Blueberry Diner site close to the new entrance to the Derngate Centre. Generally, the plans have been well received, and we are in discussions with prospective developers for phase 1 – The Blueberry Diner and Albion Street car park sites.

**Central Area Action Plan**

The results of the consultation on "Issues and Options" for the Central Area Action Plan have now been published and are available on the council's website. We shall soon be presenting a Preferred Options Paper for further consultation.

**Director of Planning & Regeneration and Head of Planning**

David Bailey has been appointed as Director of Planning and Regeneration and will start with the Council on November 1<sup>st</sup>. Susan Bridge starts at the beginning of September as the Head of Planning. I am pleased to welcome them both to the council.

## **Planning Committee meetings**

Plans are being prepared for changes to the Jeffery Room to improve arrangements for planning committee meetings. These include new audio visual equipment and furniture to improve the meetings for both members and the public. The changes will also have benefits for other meetings in the Guildhall. The chair and deputy chair of planning, as well as the leaders of the opposition parties and cabinet members have been consulted on these proposals.

## **Beckets Park and The Racecourse**

Consultations on draft proposals for Beckets Park and the Racecourse were held at the balloon festival. The Beckets Park masterplan will be being presented to cabinet shortly. Proposals for a Marina have received widespread support, and could create a major new attraction for our town. A report on the Racecourse masterplan will also be presented to cabinet, and we will be looking for further consultation opportunities, and working with Friends of the Racecourse to seek funding to implement key elements of the final masterplan.

**Cllr Richard Church**  
**September 2008**



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### Report of the Portfolio Holder for Environment

The following is an update on key issues delivered or being progressed within the Street Scene & Property Maintenance Portfolio.

#### **Street Scene**

##### **ELVIS (End of life vehicle impound scheme)**

Following the introduction of the new service level agreement in April this year, removal of abandoned vehicles continues to exceed targets. For the past three months, removal levels have been maintained at 100%. Numbers of abandoned vehicles have also decreased significantly since the rise in scrap metal prices.

##### **Britain in Bloom**

The judges visited the Borough in mid-July to look at floral displays within Northampton that have been provided by the Council as well as those of some local businesses and Headlands Primary School. The results will be revealed at a presentation to be held in Nottingham in September. Northampton is part of the 'city category' for the East Midlands.

##### **Encams – The Big Tidy**

During September NBC will be holding various 'clean-ups' across the Borough in conjunction with Encams (Keep Britain Tidy). Officers, Neighbourhood Wardens and local groups are joining together to clear-up areas to help improve their local community and environment.

It is not too late to join in, please contact Fred Williams on 01604 838042 for further information.

#### **Consultations**

##### **Rose Garden and Maze**

After consulting with the ward Councillor's, Friends of Abington Park and Members of the Abington Conservation group an Article was placed in the Chronicle and Echo outlining plans for this proposed project. Plans were on display at the Balloon Festival and are now displayed in the front foyer of the Guildhall.

To date one letter of objection has been received via The Chronicle & Echo.

Assuming the results of consultation are positive, the aim is to start the works as early as possible so it will be in place by next summer.

##### **Postcards from the Park**

The second PFP competition has just taken place. This competition is a joint initiative between the Chronicle and Echo and NBC and this year produced a record number of entries. The competition gives local photographers the opportunity to showcase their skills while at the same time highlighting the many beautiful parks across the Borough. A list of winning entries, along with some of the best submissions of the six categories, is currently on display in the Guildhall.

## Waste Services

### **Additional plastics to be recycled**

We are currently exploring new technologies to enable us to recycle additional types of plastics that can be collected from the kerbside. It is hoped that margarine and yoghurt pots will be just a few of the new additional plastics that can be added in to the existing blue recycling box.

### **Kitchen Waste Collections**

Tenders have recently been received to introduce kitchen waste collections across Northamptonshire. This is a project that has been developed through the Northamptonshire Waste Partnership that includes the Borough and County Councils along with other districts. Evaluations of the submitted returns will continue throughout September and October and once a preferred bidder has been identified, Cabinet will give further consideration for potential introduction during 2009.

### **Carbon management**

We are continuing making progress in the carbon reduction and we are now looking into others areas where we can reduce the carbon footprint in house

### **Private Sector Housing**

A joint project with the county to review DFG provision is now complete and a draft report is being produced. Additional technical officer resources have now been secured by engaging experienced agency staff and the backlog of grants is being processed. The service is in the process of transfer to Housing services

**Cllr Trini Crake**  
**September 2008**

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**Monday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2008**  
**Report of the Portfolio Holder for Performance**

**Improving the Councils Performance.**

- Preparations for the Council's Peer review, scheduled for week commencing 13<sup>th</sup> October are well underway. The Self Assessment and supporting evidence is being prepared. Further details relating to the on-site schedule will be communicated shortly.
- Performance Plus implementation evaluation has been completed. Learning will be used in planning the roll out phases across the authority. A report will be taken to Cabinet recommending the next phase of the roll-out to other service areas. This recommendation will include input from the Performance Team Leader, who joins the Council on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> September who has experience of the Performance Plus from her current authority.

An analysis of our 2007/08-outturn performance is being undertaken using recently purchased interim quartile data. This will allow us to compare our performance against all other councils earlier than is usually available, as the Audit Commission comparison data is not issued until December. A report of the outturn will be taken to Cabinet and Scrutiny benchmarking our services and highlighting areas of improvement and those requiring more attention to improve the Citizen experience.

- The Performance Team continues to work with the other Local Area Agreement partners within the county to develop a co-ordinated approach to monitoring and reporting the new National Indicators, particularly focusing in the first instance on those detailed within the new LAA.

**Higher Standards of Service**

**Electoral Services**

- The annual canvas of the Register of Electors has commenced with letters being sent to 94K households. Publicity has been arranged at the Balloon Festival and via fifty roadside posters to encourage individuals to register to Vote.
- Members of the public can confirm the details by telephone or via the internet if there are no change of circumstances to register. Initial response rates are ahead of last year and the new register will be published by the 1<sup>st</sup> December.

***Legal action to improve Services***

- Enforcement action has been taken by the Legal Department across a number of services to ensure compliance with statutory duties and quality of service provided to members of the public. Prosecutions have been undertaken in respect of Food Hygiene and Private Hire Trading.
- Legal action has also been pursued in respect of recovering outstanding Council Tax payments and over payment of Housing Benefits where individuals failed to properly advise the authority of their change of circumstances.

- Anti-Social Behaviour Orders have been obtained against two individuals, where the Courts judge the behaviour of these individuals was having a detrimental impact on the lives of their neighbours.

### ***Land Charges***

- Land charge searches are down on last year reflecting the “credit crunch”. The 22% year on year reduction in searches is a clear indicator of the reduction in property sales locally.
- The authority is currently producing consultation responses to two government proposals on Access to Data and the charges for providing extra data a part of the land search process.

### ***Licensing***

- Following requests from the public or the police or another interested party a number of the Licensed Premises reviews have been reported to Licensing Committee. This has resulted in license conditions being tightened or the license being revoked.
- In addition to the Plying for Hire prosecutions, which relate to individual drivers, the owner and operators licence holder of a local firm, has been found guilty of plying for hire fined a total of £2,015.00.
- Inspections of the premises covered by the Gambling Act are also continuing.

### **Better Information for the Public**

- Work has commenced to revise the Council’s Publication Scheme. This is a statutory requirement under section 19 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and was last revised in Jan 2003. Along with other public bodies the Borough council will submit a new scheme by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2008.
- The new scheme will list 7 classes of information compared to the previous 12 and will detail how much the Council charges for the information and whether it is publicly available, or available on request. It is anticipated that the revised scheme will be reported to Cabinet in November 2008.
- It is hoped that the new Publication scheme will enable the public to have better access to information and reduce the authorities work responding to Freedom of Information requests.

## **Supporting Councillors and our Staff**

### **Independent Remuneration Panel.**

- As reported on the Council agenda a new Independent Remuneration Panel is to be appointed to fulfil the statutory requirement that the Council has to receive independent advise on matters relating to councillor allowances and support.
- The new panel is being supported by a national expert in this field and will report its findings to council in October.

### **Single Status**

- Work is progressing with the establishment of a new project to deliver the Pay and Grading arrangements for this council. A target date for the project of April 2010 has been set.

**Cllr Brian Hoare  
September 2008**

## **Council**

**Monday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2008**

### **Report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance**

#### **7. 2007/08 Statement of Accounts**

Work has started on the audit of our 2007/08 Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement. Our external auditors, KPMG, commenced the audit at the beginning of August. In line with statutory requirement, the accounts post audit are due back to the Audit Committee, Cabinet and Council later this month.

#### **8. Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)**

The Use of Resources section of the CPA was presented to our external auditors this month too. The Use of Resources is made up of five sections; Value for Money, Financial Standing, Financial Management, Financial Reporting and Internal Control. Robust evidence was presented detailing the good work undertaken during 2007/08. The results of their review is expected at the latter end of this year. It is mainly a backward looking review.

#### **9. Budget**

The budget round for 2009/10 to 2011/12 has been launched and Finance are meeting with budget managers to assist in the process. The 2008/09 budget setting process, that included estimates for 2009/10 and 2010/11, identified that there are considerable pressures to manage in 2009/10 and future budget rounds.

**Cllr Malcolm Mildren**  
**September 2008**