

Council

Monday 27th October 2008

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Partnerships & Improvement

1. Management Restructure

The new management structure came into effect on 1st October 2008.

The result of internal recruitment was that the existing Director of Finance filled the post of Director of Finance and Support. A total of 8 Heads of Service were appointed internally. Four of these were internal promotions. In addition, one Corporate Manager was appointed to the post of Director of the Local Strategic Partnership after external advertisement.

Two new Directors, Lesley Wearing (Housing) and David Bailey (Planning & Regeneration) both join NBC in early November. Three Heads of Service (so far) are new recruits to the organisation. Interviews for the Director of Environment and Culture are expected to take place on 6th and 7th November 2008. Interviews for the Assistant Chief Executive and four other Heads of Service posts will also take place in November. There are internal candidates for some of these posts.

A new post of Head of Joint Planning has been created, within NBC but working to the Joint Strategic Planning Committee. It is hoped to advertise this jointly funded post shortly.

The new structure will contain around 50% of existing staff and managers recruited through external advertising. The integration of this new team into the Council will be a critical priority.

2. Changes to Portfolios

To ensure a close match between the management structure and the responsibilities of individual Portfolio Holders I am making some adjustments to the responsibilities of Cabinet Members as follows:-

- **Cllr Tony Woods Leader Partnerships, Policy & Improvement**
In addition to current responsibilities for Partnerships and Improvement – which are cross cutting – I will be taking direct responsibility for Policy and Communications within the Chief Executive's Office.
- **Cllr Brendan Glynane Deputy Community Safety & Engagement**
Brendan will have responsibility for Leisure & Culture within the Environment & Culture Directorate, Community Engagement within the Chief Executive's Office and for the Safer Stronger Northampton Partnership and its support teams.
Further clarification of the division of responsibility between this portfolio and the Environment Portfolio within the Environment & Culture Directorate may be required as there could be areas of overlap.
- **Cllr Sally Beardsworth Housing**
Sally will continue to be responsible for all aspects of Housing. The much greater clarity of the new management structure with a dedicated Director of Housing will help clarify Sally's area of responsibility which will be co-terminus with the Housing Directorate.

- **Cllr Trini Crake** **Environment**
 Trini will look after those parts of the Environment & Culture Directorate under the Head of Neighbourhood Services and the Head of Public Protection's teams. As above, there are some areas of overlap with the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety & Engagement's areas of interest (within Public Protection) that may need to be clarified.
- **Cllr Richard Church** **Planning & Regeneration**
 Richard will oversee the work of the Planning & Regeneration Directorate and matters relating to the Market Square.
- **Cllr Brian Hoare** **Performance and Support Services**
 Brian will oversee the Support Services (Human Resources, Customer Services & ICT. . and within the Finance & Support Services Directorate. He will continue to monitor the Council's Performance working with the Head of Performance & Improvement in the Chief Executive's Office and be responsible for legal services.
- **Cllr Malcolm Mildren** **Finance**
 Malcolm will continue to be responsible for Finance & Assets and will now have responsibility for Revenues & Benefits and Procurement.
- **Cllr David Perkins** will continue his role as Strategic Advisor to the Cabinet and will support the Portfolio Holder for Housing on the financial and contractual aspects of the Housing Asset Management Strategy.

3. Government Monitoring Board

A meeting of the Government Monitoring Board was held on 16th October 2008. This was extremely positive and formally wound up the sub-boards for Housing and Planning. This means that there are now no services of Northampton Borough Council in close supervision by the GMB. The GMB continues to monitor the overall performance of the Council. However, this is a very important step in their disengagement from Northampton Borough Council.

I should like to record our thanks to:-

1. The staff and managers in Planning and Housing whose dedication to raising performance and customer focus in their areas has resulted in the improvements that give the GMB the confidence to disengage from these services.
2. Staff in other services across the Council who have helped their colleagues in Housing and Planning to achieve disengagement. I would like to especially mention the Customer Services Team who are increasingly important in providing the first point of contact for most enquiries to this Council.
3. The members of the Sub-Boards for Planning and Housing (Chaired by Andrew Wright and Joanne Drew respectively) who have provided invaluable assistance to this Council over the past months and years.

When this Administration took control in May 2007 five service areas were subject to close government monitoring:-

1. Revenues & Benefits
2. Finance
3. Leisure & Culture
4. Planning
5. Housing

I do not claim that this Administration is solely responsible for the improvement – indeed staff must take the lion's share of any responsibility for improvement. Kendrick Ash had been appointed to support Revenues & Benefits and were already making strong progress when we came in. The Director for Finance was in post and reorganising the Finance Department to make it fit for purpose when we took control. Likewise, John Edwards, then Interim Chief Executive, had been in post for a couple of months and was beginning to stabilise the organisation.

However, there is no doubt whatsoever that the bulk of the improvement leading to disengagement from these services took place under the current Administration and benefited from this Administration's strong focus on putting right the mistakes inflicted on this Council by previous administrations.

There is no complacency. The performance, efficiency and customer focus of this Council is still in need of improvement and we are ambitious for this Council to be one of the best by 2013. This Council will continue to improve under this Administration with this realistic but challenging objective in mind.

4. IDeA Peer Review

To provide a clear benchmark of where we are as a council today as the new management arrangements take effect and as the Government Monitoring Board winds down its activities we commissioned an IDeA Peer Review. Their report will be published later this year or early in 2009. However, staff and Councillors who had been involved in the review were invited to a feedback session on Friday 17th October 2008.

Feedback was generally positive and showed that the council is making good progress. Nonetheless, and as expected, the team did raise a number of challenging issues.

Overall they identified a number of key action points for the Council as:

- Need to fully embed Team Northampton concept
- Do the big things well
- Much further clarity required on priorities and non-priorities
- Reputation issues must improve dramatically
- Resourcing and managing change initiatives and major projects
- Maintain focus on partnership development
- Strategic procurement must be quickly established and deliver
- Aggressive communications programme must be deployed

We await the final report of the Review Team which, I am sure, will be an extremely useful document that we will be able to use to accelerate improvement of the Council.

5. Fresh Thinking

At Cabinet on 15th October 2008 we launched a prospectus for Northampton – Fresh Thinking – aimed at providing a framework for discussions with partners and stakeholders on the long-term future development of Northampton.

A copy of the document can be found here:-

<http://tinyurl.com/3s2ktj>

6. The Effect of the Economic Downturn on NBC

Councillors will have seen that the Local Government Association expressed concerns at the effects on Council's of the economic downturn on 3 October 2008. See:-

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7650192.stm> for BBC coverage.

<http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pagelid=1066431> for LGA Press Release.

The effects on Northampton Borough Council could be severe. We entered this financial year knowing that we would need to find savings – mainly through better working methods and efficiency savings – of £2.772 million for the 2009/10 budget. These would not have been included in the 3 year budget passed by Council in February 2008 if we had not been confident that these savings could be found.

However, additional pressures are emerging:-

It is now predicted that a number of additional pressures could swell the gap to over £7M. The main ones are:-

- | | |
|--|-------|
| • Additional costs of Concessionary Bus Fares | £1.0M |
| • Reduction in income, principally car parking | £1.5M |
| • Increases in energy costs | £0.5M |
| • Other pressures | £1.5M |

The Administration, supported by managers, are now looking closely at where additional savings can be made.

A significant element of this budget gap is the very tight settlement in the Comprehensive Spending Review of 2007. While this provided certainty as to our funding through to the end of financial year 20010/11 the settlement:-

- Is based on a significant underestimate of Northampton's population costing us at least £0.5 million each year.
- Only providing a 0.5% increase this year and next. This decision was made in relatively benign economic circumstances. Now inflation is in excess of 5%. This is costing us a further £1 million.

In addition, government's failure to properly fund the Concessionary Bus Fares Scheme is costing this Council £1 million. Government claim the scheme is fully funded. It is not.

So £2.5 million of our funding gap is directly attributable to the failure of government to properly fund this Council to deliver its objectives.

On a brighter note, Northampton Borough Council did not have any investments in Icelandic Banks that have recently collapsed. Our investments, including short-term investments, are predominantly held in British or Irish Banks subject to government guarantees. Relatively small sums are held elsewhere but the risk is judged to be low and this money will be repatriated at the earliest opportunity.

7. Joint Strategic Planning Committee

The West Northamptonshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee has now been established and will hold its first meeting on 21st October 2008. At that meeting the Committee will be asked to adopt a revised Local Development Scheme.

8. Homeless Reception & Support Centre

I have written to the Under Secretary of State in the Department of Communities and Local Government expressing this Administration's continuing support for this Places for Change scheme project.

9. West Northamptonshire Development Corporation

We anticipate the announcement of a new Chair for the WNDC shortly.

The WNDC were not represented at the Scrutiny Inquiry into partnership working between NBC and WNDC on 2 September 2008 and I understand they will not be represented on 23 October 2008. As Board Members of WNDC, Richard Church and I are arguing strongly that the WNDC should be represented at the Inquiry and that, as an organisation, it has much to gain from working with O&S to improve partnership working.

Developers have now appealed against the WNDC's non-determination of three planning applications in and around Daventry. Inspectors will hear these early in 2009. The absence of a Local Development Framework puts West Northamptonshire at risk of 'planning by appeal' and makes it vital that we progress the production of the Local Development Framework with all dispatch.

Cllr Tony Woods
October 2008

Council

Monday 27th October 200

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement & Safety

Within the new Directorate of Environment and Culture we are bringing together Public Protection, Neighbourhood Environmental Services and Culture and Leisure

This brings such services as Environmental Health, Community Safety, Neighbourhood Wardens, Street Cleansing, Grounds and Parks Maintenance, Waste Services and Leisure centres together.

This means that each service will be able to work better together for the benefit of the town and all that live and work here. For example by exploring the use of both traditional and more recent environmental enforcement tools such as those to control litter in the town centre it is hoped that not only will it be cleaner but the council will actually need to pick less up thus saving on service costs in the future. This will help the area to appear tidier and well kept and thus giving it safer and more welcoming feel. There will be many of these opportunities that will now arise and it will be exciting to work with the teams within the new Directorate

Engagement Strategy

The action plan for the Community Engagement Strategy adopted by Cabinet is now being delivered. A consultation toolkit is in final draft, and managers will be given guidance in its use. A group has been set up to review how the Council's website can support its engagement with the community. The recently announced programme of strategic service reviews will have engagement with users as a core principle.

Forums

The Council's community forums continue to be active both in formal meetings and less formal events. Cabinet has now received the first of what will be regular reports on the forums' work, highlighting the diversity of engagement opportunities and the numbers of local people involved. The Youth Forum, for example, has been involved with local cultural and sporting organisations, and along with members of other forums taking a leading role in Local Democracy Week activities. The potential role of the forums in providing a 'critical friend' perspective on policy development, particularly its impact on diverse communities, is being assessed.

Policy and Corporate Planning

In bringing together an analysis of the various pressures facing the Council in its operating environment, through the 'Context' document adopted by Cabinet, the Council now has the beginnings of a single repository for its background business planning data. This will need to grow and develop over time, but will be used to shape the new Corporate Plan. The challenge for the

next few months is to develop a policy framework that allows the Council to develop its work programme based on clear policy decisions rather than reaction to events.

Equalities

Progress continues to be satisfactory in raising the Council's performance on equalities issues to 'level 3' of the Equalities Standard for Local Government. Equality Impact Assessments are now becoming a routine feature of policy and service development, and will need to be a key component of decision-making on budgetary options. There is still some way to go in ensuring that thorough consideration of the effects of Council activities on our diverse communities is part of the Council's culture everywhere, but training and other activities are being delivered to move towards this goal.

Culture and Leisure Services.

Culture and Leisure Services now sits within the directorate of Environment and Culture and is thus well placed to enhance and promote internal partnership working across these and other NBC service areas to promote Leisure, Sport, Play and Cultural activity. In turn, we will be focussed on improving participation and health as well as promoting social cohesion and quality of life.

Leisure Services

All 3 Leisure Centres are being re-audited for QUEST quality award over the next 3 months.

This will be the second audit for QUEST and we are hopeful that all scores will improve by at least 5%, and will aspire to reach the 'highly commended' status, thus achieving the upper quartile in the country.

Trilogy Fitness Suites are currently on target to achieve in excess of over £1 million income, excluding VAT.

Free swimming for over 60's and under 16's has been accepted, and will commence in April 2009 for 2 years.

All participants, to gain access will need to apply for a 'swim only' leisure card (free of charge) that will be used for proof of age.

Participation by over 50's has reached a record high since recording attendances, and thus over 50's contribute over £20k per month to Leisure income.

Chartermark (Customer Service Excellence) will be re-audited in December 2008, for the whole of Leisure Services.

Northampton Sports And Play Development Team

The 3-year, Big Lottery funded, Play Development Programme, Northampton Improved Places for Play started on 1st September. We have employed 2 new staff members as Play Rangers (Chris Serbyn and Jemma Locke) who are also acting up as the Play Development Worker on a temporary basis until November 2008.

Our team led on a successful joint application with NBC Neighbourhood Co-ordinators, NBC Street Cleansing Support Team and The Friends of Eastfield Park for a £50,000 grant from the Playbuilders fund to provide new challenging and innovative play equipment for Eastfield Park.

The 3 year Eastfield and Spencer Sport and Physical Activity Project funded by Sport England's Community Investment Fund (CIF) started on 1st September. We have employed a full time Development Officer (Nina Bridge) and a part time Coordinator (Mark Lyons) to lead on the project.

Our new Sports Development Officer, Steve Johnson, started on 6th October replacing Andrew Jackson who left in July 2008 to pursue a career in teaching. Steve will be working on a variety of sport and physical activity projects and initiatives

EVENTS, MUSEUMS AND ARTS

Christmas Lights

The Events Team is working closely with their colleagues at Westbridge to produce a good show of lights this year. Without having the large budgets of yesteryear, the Team are hoping to provide the maximum number of lights without incurring large infrastructure costs. LED's will be used extensively this year. They are much lower maintenance than ordinary bulbs, and power consumption is minimal.

Creative Apprenticeship

The museums service has been successful in its bid to host a Creative Apprentice. Part of a national scheme, and externally funded by Renaissance, this will give an opportunity to a young person to gain practical experience in the areas of heritage, events, and the arts.

Audience Development

Another Renaissance funded project sees the installation of a p.c. in the galleries at the museum in Guildhall Road. Visitors will be able to input information about themselves and their visitor experience directly into the computer. This information can then be used to gain a much more comprehensive picture of who the museums' visitors are. This information can then be used directly to inform the audience development plan for the museums.

Northamptonshire Heritage Awards

The museum service was successful in three award categories at this years awards held at Sulgrave Hall. These were the Inspiration award for 'X marks the spot'; the Best exhibition award for ' Best Foot Forward '; and a highly commended for the ' Death in Venice' murder mystery.

One8 Festival

The team of young people who were responsible for ' X marks the spot ' represented Northampton at a large regional showcase event at Nottingham. This was a celebration of all the work museums have done working with young people.

Market Square

The Events Team continues its input into the Market Square project by drawing up briefs for the consultants to pull together a programme of events for the space, and by preparing the job specification for a new NBC events post for the square.

Diwali

The Indian Hindu Welfare Organisation chaired by Neelam applied for Arts Council funding earlier in the year using NBC (my time) as support in kind. They were successful in getting £5000 and Festive Road (Carnival Arts) were commissioned to work on the project. To date 48 lanterns have been made at Delapre Primary School and 30 lanterns at the Gujarati Saturday school over a series of workshops. There are open workshops at The Fishmarket this coming Friday and Saturday for public participation. A 6 ft figure has been constructed by Festive Road and will be pulled on a trailer. The idea is to tell the story of Rama and Sita and the procession on the 25th October will represent this - Delapre Primary school lanterns represent the forest/birds/trees and the Gujarati School represent the monkey section. The flower lanterns will be used from last year and the Diva light (paid for by the Arts Team a few years ago) will be carried by leading Councillors. IHWO will provide the lorry to carry "Rama and Sita" and will be at the rear of the procession and candles will be offered at The Guildhall and All Saints Church.

Customer Service Operations

Customer Services celebrated National Customer Services Week during the week beginning 6th October. The team organised a number of events to recognise and reward the role that customer service professionals play within the Council. An awards ceremony was held on Friday 10th October and prizes were awarded to the most complimented team (Face to Face Operations), the most popular internal customer service department (Post Room), and individual prizes for achieving their Institute of Customer Services Award.

The main focus of the week was around asking our customers how they felt about the service received. Customers using the Contact Centre were called back to ask their opinion on the service and all week staff have been conducting exit surveys in the One Stop Shop. Suggestion boxes were also left in the Council's other offices and leisure centres. The views of customers will be fed into work that has begun on our Customer Access Strategy.

Support Services

The Council has signed a new deal with Royal Mail called Clean Mail advance. The contract will save NBC 2.9 pence per second class letter. At current postage levels, this means a saving of approximately £15,000 per year. Managers are working closely with Royal Mail to get the new contract working within the current financial year.

Cllr Brendan Glynane

October 2008

Council

Monday 27th October 2008

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Housing

The following is an update on key issues delivered or being progressed within the housing services portfolio.

Performance

The Housing sub group of the Government monitoring board held its final meeting in September. The report to the main board has recognised significant improvements in housing in the last 18 months. The lead inspector from the Audit Commission will still be visiting on a monthly basis to continue their support to the authority.

The Sheltered Housing service is currently being inspected by the Supporting People team to ensure compliance with the quality assessment framework. I hope to be able to report positively on the outcome of this inspection at the next full Council meeting.

1. Partnership Working

Officers recently met with their counterparts in Daventry to make progress on the sub regional Choice based lettings scheme. Now that "Homechoice" is up and running in Northampton we can look at extending the scheme more widely in the county.

Trends are starting to emerge following the economic downturn although the true extent of the impact is not yet known. The Council understands that there have been on average 45 mortgage repossessions a month in the town in the last quarter and that secondary debt, e.g. credit cards, is now a major factor contributing to this increase. The Housing Service are working with partner Housing Associations and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to ensure an ongoing supply of affordable housing for vulnerable people.

Key Issues

Lesley Wearing, the new Director of Housing starts work on 3rd November.

Recruitment is also underway for the vacant Head of Service positions, Head of Landlord Services and Head of Investment and Strategy.

Cabinet approved the new Homelessness strategy on 15th October. The key themes of this strategy, which is for the next 5 year period are; partnership working, early intervention, work with 16/17 year olds and improving the quality of temporary accommodation.

2. Housing Asset Management Strategy

The Housing Asset Management Strategy is about the need to invest in our housing stock and our ability to identify the funds to enable us to do so. It is increasingly clear that the Council has been seriously under-investing in the maintenance of our council housing for many years. We are not alone in that and the Decent Homes Standard is one mechanism that the government have used to try to reverse this trend.

There is currently an opportunity to submit an "Expression of Interest" for a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) bid for up to £100 million to regenerate, refurbish and renew Council housing areas. PFI is neither universally popular nor an easy option. However, nearly 40 schemes are currently in various stages of progression. PFI is one of a very limited range of options available so it would be irresponsible to ignore it at this stage.

Cabinet on 30th October 2008 will consider options for our Housing Asset Management Strategy and whether to submit an expression of interest for this round of Housing PFI credits.

To retain as wide a range of options as possible and to ensure that we have a strong evidence base we will be undertaking a Housing Options Appraisal. The last Housing Options Appraisal undertaken in 2005 needs to be updated – not least because the Council's financial data is now much more robust.

Ward members in 'Northampton East' have been briefed on the options available. We will be holding a further "Housing Visioning Day" on 29 October 2008 in the Guildhall.

Employment & Support Allowance

The legislation goes "live" on the 27th October, which we are currently on track to meet. The software has been delivered and is being tested, with upgrade to full system booked for this weekend. The training program is in the process of being delivered for back office and customer service teams.

Benefit Processing

Continues to be delivered in accordance with targets, 16 days new, 8 days changes, however with the current economic climate as it is, we have started to closely monitor our active caseload. We will keep everybody informed of findings and potential impacts and risks.

Council Tax Collection

Similar to benefits in the fact, on target, but have now started to monitor trends in customer behaviour and ability to pay etc.

Business Rates

Still on target, but 2% reduction in collection rate as compared to last year. This is mainly due to the changes in legislation with regard to empty rates (national variances between 2-6% impact). We have also started to send out more reminders recently, as compared to previous years, which suggests some businesses are potentially having cash flow issues.

Cllr Sally Beardsworth
October 2008

Council

Monday 27th October, 2008

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Environment

3. Public Protection – the coming together of services

The new council structure brings Environmental Health, Community Safety and Neighbourhood Wardens services together. This enables the well being of residents and the environment in Northampton to be better protected and improved. These combined services will seek ways of working together to produce real benefits and better outcomes for the town.

As Portfolio Holder I look forward to working with the Public Protection Team

Carbon management

The Carbon Trust's funding arm, Salix, carried out an audit on our strategy for the reduction of carbon with Atkins. After a rigorous check they found we had reached a high standard and agreed to match fund £25,250 in Oct, £36,650 in Jan 09 and £31,842 in April 09.

The independent assessors concluded, "Northampton Borough Council has the capability to successfully manage the Fund and implement the related projects. There is good integration across the various interested functions within the Borough. Furthermore, there is clearly a good degree of high level support for the initiative".

The 9 projects are:

- ❑ Loft Insulation at Lings.
- ❑ Cavity Wall Insulation at Weston Favell.
- ❑ Pipe insulation – boiler rooms
- ❑ St Johns car park – energy efficient lighting
- ❑ Steam control valve fixed/replaced at Mounts Baths LC.
- ❑ Time clocks – on NBC appliances
- ❑ Variable Speed Drive replacement at Lings Forum.
- ❑ Power Perfector voltage optimization – Guildhall, Westbridge, Mayorhold, Lings, St Michael's car park, Cliftonville, Mounts Baths, Danes Camp.
- ❑ Building Energy Management System – extended at Guildhall

Food and Safety services

This service within Public Protection is committed to helping businesses maintain and improve the standard of Food Hygiene and Health and Safety. However, NBC will take sanctions against those who seem not to care and who put members of public at risk. In the August and September 2008 the council successfully prosecuted 2 local businesses for food safety offences.

Where are the safest places to eat in Northampton? The local media have shown great interest in the web site that has been developed with the county Environmental Health Services that displays the results of Food Safety inspections using a system of star ratings. Last Saturday's Chronicle and Echo had a 7 page spread listing all the 4 and 5 star places in the town. Those businesses gained positive publicity by ensuring their hygiene standards are high.

4. Neighbourhood Environmental Services

The following is an update on key issues delivered or being progressed within Neighbourhood Environmental Services

Street Scene

Britain in Bloom

In September 2008 Northampton were awarded a Silver Gilt medal award for Best in City category in East Midlands in Bloom, missing out on the much coveted Gold Medal by three points.

Street Cleansing

Weed spraying contractors are currently working across the Borough, carrying out the 3rd spray of the year. This function is funded by NCC, and allows us to spray up to four times per annum.

Grounds/Parks.

All summer bedding plants are in the process of being removed, and beds made ready for winter bedding. We will also have some winter hanging baskets this year, around the town centre/Guildhall area.

The Council has recently submitted to the County Council, 3 bids for play builder money. We have been successful for one bid for improved play equipment in Eastfield Park. This new equipment needs to be challenging and suitable for use by 8-13 year olds.

Abandoned vehicles

The new contractors employed since April this year are continuing to deliver an excellent service and our performance indicators for this service are both running at a 100%. The ELVIS partnership is now being quoted as best practice and has received a number of enquiries from other authorities across the country.

Waste & Recycling Services

Glass collections

Cabinet have selected their preferred option for kerbside glass collections. The next steps include developing a detailed implementation plan. The preferred option is to use a specialist refuse vehicle with a Pod at the front for the glass and a compaction unit at the rear to collect the existing recyclates. This enables one vehicle to collect plastics/cans or paper/card alongside glass.

Additional plastics to be recycled

Waste & Recycling Service is now able to collect additional plastics such as margarine tubs, yoghurt pots and food trays. We have informed our customers through the media and by using hook-on labels that can be attached to wheelie bins and recycling boxes. This will help customers to reduce the amount of non-recyclable waste that goes into their black bin or sack.

New Recycling Calendars

The new recycling calendars for 2008/09 will be sent to customers shortly. They will show all the bin/box collection days, including the arrangements for Christmas and New Year 2008. They will also show the green waste 6-week suspension period.

Construction Services

Recently completed projects

The Construction team have just completed two new schemes to prevent flooding at Billing Brook Road and Rillwood Court.

New projects

The team are just starting two new projects, a new footpath in Dallington Cemetery and a new septic tank at Welford Road.

Cllr Trini Crake

October 2008

Council
Monday 27th October, 2008

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration

Concessionary Fares

It is good news that so many older people are using the free bus pass scheme. Leaving their car behind and using the bus saves both their pockets and the planet. The cost of the concessionary bus fares scheme is set to rise by £1 million, but the increased cost is not met by the government, putting the burden on the council tax payer and other council services. This extra cost is affecting councils around the country, and we will be pressing the government to properly fund the concessionary bus fares scheme.

Regional Spatial Strategy

The cabinet has responded to the consultation on proposed changes to the regional spatial strategy. We have objected to changes that might lead to more development related to the growth of Northampton being separated from our town, destroying more open countryside, and we have also called for a review of the timetable for new housing. The current economic downturn means that building 7,250 new homes between 2006 and 2011 is unrealistic, and we have asked for the housing targets to be amended to reflect that.

Beckets Park and The Racecourse

Progress on masterplans for both of these parks will be reported to cabinet on 5th November. New development beside the river provides a great opportunity to improve Beckets park as our prime town centre park, opening up the riverside and creating new links to the town centre. The Racecourse masterplan has developed through the dedication of volunteers in the Healthy Living Hub and Friends of Northampton Racecourse, supported by the funding from the River Nene Regional Park.

Northampton's Heritage

In recent weeks the spotlight has been on our town's excellent architectural heritage. On the weekend of 13th/14th September, thousands of people visited some of the town's finest buildings, including this one. The council put together a promotional leaflet for the event. A special thank you to our Heritage Champion, Jean Hawkins, who helped organise the event, and to all the volunteers, including a number of other councillors who helped on the day and all of the property owners who ensured that their buildings were open to visitors. On Monday 13th October, Northampton Borough Council hosted a Northamptonshire Heritage Summit in the Guildhall organized by English Heritage. It was well supported by many volunteers with an interest in Heritage, as well as the other Borough and District Councils and the County Council.

Market Square

Work on plans to regenerate the Market square continue, and include discussions with the Market Traders on the proposed layout. We will ensure that there is space for every trader currently using the square, plus room to grow as we attract more and different types of trader. Our aim is for Northampton Market square to take its rightful place as one of the finest town centre squares in England, the hub of the town for people to shop, relax and enjoy. To achieve that it needs to be a

place that can cater for a whole variety of uses of which a regular trading market is one key component.

Joint Planning Unit

The West Northamptonshire Joint Strategic Committee is holding its first meeting on 21st October 2008. The Committee is being asked to approve the revised Local Development Scheme for the preparation of the Joint Core Strategy and other Joint Development Plan documents, including the Developer Contributions and Affordable Housing DPD. The Borough Council takes the Chair of the Joint Strategic Committee on 21st October and becomes the lead manager of the Joint Planning Unit under the direction of the Director of Planning and Regeneration.

Cllr Richard Church

October 2008

Council
Monday 27th October 2008

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Performance

LEGAL SERVICES

The council continues to take action to maintain standards across the town and to reinforce acceptable behaviour of our citizens. Recently two food outlets have been successfully prosecuted for multiple breaches of food hygiene regulations, both cases received wide publicity and sends a message to other food outlets that the Council will take action to protect the users of such outlets.

The Council has also implemented its first court order demoting a Council Tenancy from Secure to Introductory this policy enables the council to take swifter action to end the tenancy should there be anti-social behaviour or rent arrears. An ASBO with a power of arrest has been secured, which will help to reduce anti-social behaviour in an area and finally the Council successfully defended an appeal against a Housing Benefit Fraud conviction, the Court award the Council significant costs as part of its judgement.

Lexcel

Legal Services continue to make steady progress towards the achievement of Lexcel accreditation (the Law Societies Quality Standard) of the service by November. A mock assessment carried out for us by Corby Council found the service well on track to pass the assessment.

ELECTORAL REGISTRATIONS

Nine weeks in to the annual canvass of voters a 74.5% response rate has been achieved with an extra 5K returns being received, an increase of 6% on this time last year. There is a considerable increase in Internet registration for those with "no changes", the increased use of the Internet shows that the Council's drive to e-enable more of its services is proving to be successful.

There has also been a considerable increase in Postal Vote applications with an additional 9,460 requested to date. This would bring an estimated total number of Postal Votes at the end of canvass close to 30,000.

LAND CHARGES

The recent trend in the housing market is reflected in the 25% reduction in search requests compared to the same time last year but more importantly a dramatic swing to personal searches associated with the introduction of HIPS packs. The fee for Personal Searches is set by the Government and does not cover the cost of providing this service and the LGA is asking Government to urgently review this matter.

Personal searches now account for 82% of the Land Search requests but this form of search does not provide access to all registers that may be of interest to house purchasers.

5. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The 'Place Survey'

The Council, together with the County Council and all other district councils is carrying out a government led survey asking people living within the county what it is like to live in their area and how things could be improved for the future. The findings will be available from February 2009 and will be used to make changes to the way services are run to bring about improvements to things that matter most to people.

Performance Headlines- August 2008

The council continues to focus on the indicators that are not achieving the targeted level of performance or do not match the performance in the previous year. Overall the picture is of an improving level of services.

Compared to the same time last year, burglary, robbery, vehicle crime and violent crime have all reduced. The amount of household waste the council sent to landfill reduced in August. Recycling and composting levels remained the same while the amount of waste collected from residents fell.

The council is playing its part in ensuring that businesses get paid as quickly as possible, by meeting their target of paying their invoices on time during August. Cabinet have asked for work to be undertaken to reduce the target from 30 to 10 days for payment. At the same time it is important that the Council ensures that it collects money due as quickly as possible. All of the council house rent due in August was collected together with an additional 3.60% of existing rent arrears. Furthermore the number of our tenants owing more than 7 weeks rent also fell below 10% for the first time this year.

HUMAN RELATIONS

The new management organisation took effect 1st October and recruitment continues to fill outstanding vacant positions. In support of the new organisation a programme for Senior Management Development and culture change is being developed with the Chief Executive as part of the development of **TEAM NORTHAMPTON**.

Progress has been made with resolution of Equal Pay liabilities during September. Around 75% of the potential agreed Equal Pay claims have been settled with individual COT3 settlements. Work is ongoing with the remainder to seek to resolve them before they proceed to Tribunal.

Discussions are underway reviewing current Absence Management procedures with the objective of streamlining these and providing clearer guidance and support to managers to tackle these issues.

A review of Recruitment processes and procedures has been undertaken of and these will be simplified with the objective of halving the time taken to recruit, putting greater emphasis on internal advertising of vacancies to improve internal employee development and reducing the costs of external advertising and use of agency staff.

Brian Hoare

October 2008

Council

Monday 27th October 2008

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance

Final Accounts

The 2007/08 accounts were reviewed by the Audit Committee on 25th September and approved by Council on the 29th September. The accounts received an unqualified opinion with no significant changes. Our auditors, KPMG, commented favourably on the improvement in the quality of the accounts and the positive, robust, relationship the Finance Section now have with them. It was also recognised that whilst finance performance, particularly in relation to the accounts, had significantly improved, that there is still scope for further improvement therefore a meeting will be held with our auditors to discuss improvements in process for next year.

Use of Resources

The evidence for the use of resources inspection was submitted to KPMG in August for audit. As part of their presentation on the accounts in September, KPMG indicated to the Audit Committee, that, subject to a final review of the evidence submitted for the use of resources inspection, in their view the authority had “passed” the use of resources inspection. This will still be subject to the normal Audit Commission review later this year but signs are positive.

The Budget

Work is well underway on the medium term financial plan, and the 2009/10 budget in particular. There are significant pressures and we are currently predicting a budget gap. These pressures, along with the known budget gap of £2.772m (which is included from the 2008/09 budget process, need to be off set by efficiencies and service reductions to enable the Council to balance the 2009/10 budget. This means that the Council, in line with the public and business, must make economies. We are looking to make services more efficient, deliver better value for money, rein in expenditure and reduce service levels, where necessary, over this difficult period of time. This will also need to be managed carefully in this financial year to ensure that there is minimal impact in reserves. Management board and managers are fully engaged in the budget process and options for addressing the gap are being worked up.

Investments

The authority did not have any investments in the Icelandic banks. We have changed our investment strategy and are placing our investments in UK banks and financial institutions, which are backed by Government Guarantee. We have some long-term overseas exposure - £5m out of a total investment portfolio of circa £76m is but current advice indicated that the risk is not significant. This is made up of £2m in Singapore and £3m in Irish Banks' which are currently not covered by the Irish Government's guarantee.

Risk

A Risk Management and Emergency Planning knowledge briefing is being held for Members on 13th November in Room 1, commencing at 3pm and 6pm. Please book to attend this important session.

Procurement Shared Service

The Council and five of its partners, Daventry, Corby, Wellingborough, Kettering and South Northamptonshire and signed an agreement to delivery procurement services jointly with the Borough as the host and lead. The service commences formally on the 3rd of November, when Gary Pyne, joins the borough as head of the shared service.

Former United Social Club, Green Street

We are in active discussions with WNDC over the future of the former United Social Club in Green Street, close to the Railway Station. We are looking at the part this land holding could play in bringing forward a comprehensive development of this locality.

Business Rates Liabilities

We are engaged in a programme of review of the opportunities for reducing the business rates liabilities of the Borough Council. A number of opportunities have already been identified and this will help the Council to achieve refunds in the current year and reduced costs in 2009/10.

Delapre Abbey Preservation Trust

We are working closely with the Delapre Abbey Preservation Trust to select an appropriate consultant to undertake the Delapre Parkland Appraisal study. This will help to support the bid that will be made to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the restoration of the property and its grounds.

Flooding – Links View, Parklands

Using the well being powers of the Council we are continuing to meet the cost of further investigations by external consultants of the causes of the flooding to gardens of residents of Links View, Parklands. We hope that this will help to identify possible measures that can reduce this risk in future.

Theatre Trust

We are continuing to work closely with the Theatre Trust to progress the second phase of roof renewal works to those parts of Royal and Dergate that the Council agreed to fund earlier this year".

Cllr Malcolm Mildren

October 2008