

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

**Portfolio Holder Presentations**

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## Portfolio Holder Report for Partnerships & Improvement

Northampton Borough Council

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

### Management Restructure

Julie Seddon has accepted the post of Director of Environment and Culture. Julie is currently with Staffordshire Connects and expects to take up her post at the start of March 2009.

Cara Boden has accepted the post of Assistant Chief Executive. Cara is currently with Bedfordshire County Council and also expects to start with NBC early in 2009.

### Meeting with Phil Hope MP – Regional Minister for the East Midlands

The Chief Executive and I met the East Midlands regional minister at his office in London on 19<sup>th</sup> November to discuss issues relating to the regeneration and growth of Northampton and to the challenges of the current economic situation.

Now the performance of the Borough Council is improving and we are better equipped to participate positively in partnership working we wanted an opportunity to discuss how the Borough Council could work with government and others to help support citizens and local businesses in difficult economic times while progressing the regeneration of Northampton. We discussed a number of options including bringing forward capital projects to enable private sector led development once the economy starts to improve.

We discussed the implications of the Sub National Review of economic development and regeneration. We believe that Northampton, as the fourth largest (soon to be third largest) city in the East Midlands and the largest town in the Milton Keynes South Midlands growth area, needs to have a place on the Local Leader's Forum proposed to help shape future regional strategy. Currently, Northampton is not guaranteed a place on this forum and Northamptonshire as a whole is only proposed to have 2 seats as against 3 for Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and Derbyshire, with 2 for Lincolnshire and 1 for Rutland. If Northampton is denied a place we can expect the current trend where regional resources are disproportionately allocated to "the three cities" and the core area of the region to the disadvantage of Northampton and Northamptonshire to continue unabated.

We also discussed the pressures that the current recession is placing on the Borough Council. In particular, I pointed out that the local council is often one of the first places that people in difficulties turn for help and advice and, in the current economic circumstances we need to be gearing up to meet this challenge.

### Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2009-10

We have now had confirmation that our grant will increase by 0.53% in 2009-10. This is very slightly below expectations given in the government's announcement of a three-year settlement period in late 2007 as a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007.

While in line with expectations this settlement does nothing to correct the gross error in population figures being used by government in determining our grant. Government grant for 2008/9 is proposed to be based on a population estimate of 197,500 while Northampton's population was estimated by the Government's Office for National Statistics as being 202,800, rising to over 210,000 by 2011. I estimate that in 2009, the population figures used to decide the grant to this Borough Council will be nearly 6% below the real figures. This is a disgrace and I will be seeking a meeting with Ministers to discuss our financial situation.

This under-funding, together with the budget pressures reported previously, mean that we will need to focus on key priorities in the next financial year. There will be hard choices to be made in February.

Our main priorities need to be: -

- Assuring the Council's improvement journey continues and delivers for customers
- Protecting Northampton against the worsening impact of economic conditions, with emphasis on:
  - Maintaining the economic vitality of the town centre
  - Assisting those most vulnerable in the recession
- Securing the regeneration of Northampton

The Portfolio holder for Housing will report on the fantastic news that this Council has been chosen to fast-track various initiatives to help people vulnerable to the recession. We hope and intend to do even more.

#### Public Service Board

The Northamptonshire Partnership Board (the Public Service Board) met on 24th November. A key item for discussion was the application of £2.5M of funding from the East Midlands Efficiency and Improvement Partnership delegated to Northamptonshire.

Following a rigorous process seventeen projects have been identified to be undertaken over the next three years. These focus on capacity building, partnership working and procurement improvements. This Council's officers are leading large parts of this agenda.

#### West Northamptonshire Development Corporation

A new Chair, John Markham OBE, will take up his appointment on 1st December. Richard Church and I have had one to one meetings with John Markham. He has a clear view of where he wants to take the WNDC – which will be towards a more co-operative organisation working more closely with local authorities and focused clearly on delivering regeneration and growth.

#### **Tony Woods**

Leader of the Council

Portfolio Holder for Partnerships & Improvement



## Portfolio Holder Report for Community Engagement & Safety

Northampton Borough Council

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

### Anti-social behaviour

Northampton Borough Council continues to work well in partnership with Northants County Council and Northants Police Authority to tackle anti-social behaviour in an effective, intelligence-led way.

Since November 2007, the Northampton Anti-social Behaviour Unit has been monitoring breaches of Anti-social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and Criminal Anti-social Behaviour Orders (CRASBOs) across the town. By pooling the expertise of local government and law-enforcement officers, Northampton's Custody Watch is able to keep records of every offender in Northampton. While it remains the role of Police to pursue prosecutions following breaches, this council maintains a vital role in reducing disorder on our streets through this unit's partnership working.

The following figures show significant successes around crime prevention when taken in the context of persistent offenders, who comprise the bulk of breaches to behaviour orders:

- 53 – current number of ASBO/CRASBOs in operation within the Borough boundaries.
- 38 – breaches recorded since November 2007.
- 33 – number of breaches now being proceeded against.
- 13 – number of offenders who subsequently breach their order.
- 8 – number of offenders responsible for no more than one breach

Notably, only 24% of breaches were committed by individual offenders; the remaining 76% were committed by five persistent offenders.

### Culture and Leisure Services

The new Directorate of Environment and Culture is determined to promote the best in affordable leisure facilities whilst ensuring good value for the taxpayer Pound. The Directorate has undertaken the following audits against 'Quest' criteria:

- Lings Forum and Cinema – 19<sup>th</sup> November 2008
- Mounts Baths – 24<sup>th</sup> November 2008

Danes Camp has also been nominated as a finalist for the Association of Public Sector Excellence (APSE) Awards' for the 'Most Improved Data Performance' category.

This month, Leisure Services is being audited against Chartermark (Customer Service Excellence) criteria; we will keep councillors informed once this has been completed.

## **Northampton Sports and Play Development Team**

The Borough Council's Play Rangers provided a range of play opportunities for 4-16 year olds in Abington Park and the Racecourse for the first time in October half term. More than one hundred children benefited from these activities over three days.

Last month marked the successful launch of the Eastfield and Spencer Sport and Physical Activity Project, involving the Mayor, at events at Eastfield Primary School and Earl Spencer Primary School. The group organised its first activities in half term, encouraging 8-15 year olds to really get into sport. Our thanks go to Northampton Casuals Rugby Club, Northampton Soccer Stars, St Crispens & Ryelands Cricket Club and Northampton Saints Hockey Club who all supported the initiative. We hope to work with these and other clubs in the future to make sure facilities are accessible to every child in Northampton.

The Northampton Street Football Project held a three-day festival at Lings Forum, also in half term, involving over 130 young people from 8-18. The festival generated a great deal of media attention, from BBC Northampton Radio, BBC 'Look East' and the Chronicle & Echo.

## **Events, Museums And Arts**

The Events Team supported the Town Centre Partnership's Christmas Parade on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2008. Despite the adverse press attention – now also an annual event – this year's decorations have proved more attractive – and more visible – than either of the two previous years.

Following successful productions so far, the Royal & Derngate continues to promote its Christmas Pantomime. Councillors would do well to remember that without this council, such an enjoyable attraction for our town would be impossible.

## Creative Apprenticeship

Northampton's Museums Service has been successful in its bid to host a Creative Apprentice. Part of a national scheme, this will provide a comprehensive apprenticeship for a young person to gain practical experience of working in heritage and the arts.

## Museums

A PC has been installed in the Osbourne Robinson Gallery, providing information and internet access for customers. This machine serves the dual purpose of allowing staff to maintain valuable audience data.

The Northampton Museum now has a Flic-R presence on-line, making quality photos of Northampton available to web-users across the globe. The Museum's 'photostream' currently includes images of the Northamptonshire Regiment, the Shoe Museum and contemporary 'Street Life'. Despite not having been widely publicised, these pictures have already seen 571 unique 'hits'.

## **Brendan Glynnane**

Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement & Safety



## Portfolio Holder Report for Housing

Northampton Borough Council

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

### 1. Background

The Borough's new Director of Housing, Lesley Wearing, started work on 3rd November. We are currently in the process of recruiting to remaining senior posts.

#### Tenants Survey 2008

This council is required to carry out a biennial tenants' survey asking residents their views of the services we provide. This survey is well under way and the number of surveys returned, very encouraging. The findings will be available from March 2009 and will form the basis of our plans to tackle the issues that matter most to tenants.

### 2. Performance

The Sheltered Housing service was recently awarded level "B" by Supporting People under the quality assessment framework. This marks a real improvement in performance, soon after the implementation of the new management structure. We are, of course, aiming to achieve level "A" next time round.

The Call Care Service has now passed Part 2 of the Telecare Services' Association (TSA) accreditation scheme, having passed Part 1 in May. This too is a 'sign of the times' that customers and residents are feeling the benefits of changes under the direction of this council.

Congratulations should go to all the staff in our Housing Needs service. It is their hard work that improves the lives of families using our services.

Choice Based Lettings has been in operation since July. Since then we have seen 16,170 bids for 588 properties, meaning both demand and satisfaction for our homes remain high.

So-called 'voids' performance has dipped slightly since Choice Based Lettings was introduced, but this is because we have been able to let empty properties using Choice Based Lettings.

As might be expected, we have seen a reduction in affordable homes' delivery with the credit squeeze. We are, as a council, ahead of the curve in working up solutions to help families facing homelessness at this difficult time.

This council is on course to better its targets to get more privately owned empty homes into use.

As ever, our main challenges are quick turn-around-times for filling empty homes and for collecting rent arrears. With our new team almost in place, we are looking to find new answers to these questions.

## **Housing Asset Management Strategy**

On 30th October, Cabinet approved its Housing Asset Management Strategy to redevelop previously overlooked parts of the town, including Eastfield, Bellinge, Thorplands and Blackthorns. Cabinet has now submitted a formal 'expression of interest' to the government which, if successful, would see an unprecedented £167 million coming to these areas – something this council has not been able to achieve in the past.

As I advised at our last meeting, the 2005 Housing Options Appraisal now needs to be updated; Cabinet has set up an Advisory Panel of members which will report back in the New Year. The panel's first meeting was on 24<sup>th</sup> November. This group will set out the options for a further third of the Borough's homes, to be renewed in the next three years.

### **3. Partnership Working**

A steering group was set up to co-ordinate the council's response to the credit crunch and make sure we prevent families from losing their homes. Three sub-groups have now been formed to look at employment, housing finance and the supply of homes. We are working with several community groups, including Citizens' Advice Bureau, Job centre Plus and Connexions, as well as Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to make sure we reach out to residents in their hour of need.

In particular, we are looking at ways to keep families in their homes through practical measures like mortgage rescue schemes, which would allow us to share the difficulties of homeownership with families at an uncertain time. In the spirit of partnership working, we are working with councils of every size, shape and persuasion to ensure we strike the right balance between risk and security for the Borough's hard-working homeowners.

#### ***Tenant's Mortgage Rescue Scheme \*\*\****

In January, DCLG will hold a regional event aimed at tackling homelessness for councils in the East Midlands. Cabinet will continue to work with its partners in the region and in government to improve this council's performance and restore its reputation.

#### **Pay and Productivity**

Since the Audit Commission's report of Property Maintenance services in February 2007, we worked tirelessly with the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) to instil a new culture among our staff, which marries considerations for efficiency with the very best of public sector values.

We have now concluded a 'Pay and Productivity' deal with our tradesmen; and our thanks go to APSE, and the Trades Unions, including UCATT, UNITE, UNISON and GMB, who helped make this happen. With these key stakeholders now in agreement, every home in our care can be repaired quickly and efficiently. This is also another decisive break with the past.

#### **Sally Beardsworth**

Portfolio Holder for Housing



## Portfolio Holder Report for the Environment

Northampton Borough Council

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

### Carbon Management

Northampton Borough Council graduated from Phase 5 of the Local Authority Carbon Management Programme (LACM), accredited by the Carbon Trust.

This success reflects the Borough Council's commitment to best practice in environmental services and to a low-carbon future for Northampton. Both the Carbon Trust and the Energy Saving Trust are now supporting the Borough's efforts to pursue a programme for better carbon management under the LACM Strategy and Implementation Plan.

The Borough has now received the first of three payments from Salix for carbon management projects, set out in previous reports. These projects will soon be under way.

Following an internal recruitment drive for 'Save It' campaigners among council staff, we now have 47 advocates, in-house, informed and enthused about 'greening' the Borough's internal operations.

The Borough's Green Office Guide proposal is progressing well. Once developed, it will provide a focus for our campaigners to use in driving forward the delivery of really greener council services.

The Borough's Eco-Champion Award Scheme recognises individuals' contributions to greening council services. We now have eight eco-champions and hope to have more shortly.

### Food/Health and Safety

On 17<sup>th</sup> November, the Borough played a leading role, working in partnership with Anglian Water and neighbouring local authorities in launching an innovative scheme to recycle commercial waste from restaurants. As a result of this joint venture between business and local councils, recyclable waste from fats, oils and grease can now be collected from participating businesses free-of-charge and turned into bio diesel. This will mean fewer blocked drains, cleaner sewage works and lower cost utility bills. This was launched in Northampton ahead of a national initiative to encourage businesses to be smarter about the waste they create.

### Construction Services

The Borough has successfully begun work on the following projects:

- Drainage at Abington Park – pipes have been laid to stop spring water flooding the rose garden.
- Drainage to the football pitches at Gate Lodge Close, Round Spinney – a system has been put in place to prevent flooding of business premises nearby.



- A footpath in Dallington Cemetery is now in place to facilitate pedestrian access to the cemetery's new burial area.
- Following the recent Britain in Bloom competition, the Borough has started to refurbish seats in the town centre, including 15 hexagonal seats in Abington St and 35 benches around All Saints, Mercers Row and The Drapery.

### Street Scene

- An overgrown area of Pleydell Road Allotments has now been cleared, giving the community an extra 38 plots. 32 of these have already been let.
- Winter bedding has been planted across the town, including winter baskets in the town centre for the first time in years.
- A £50,000 'Playbuilder' fund has been awarded for play equipment to be installed at Eastfield Park. The Borough is currently working with residents to ensure its location and specification meet the community's needs.
- Work has also started on the new memorial rose garden in Abington Park. Our thanks go to the Mayor for turning the first spade of soil – our dedicated team are now filling in the rest.

### Domestic Waste & Recycling

- Assisted collection leaflets are available at the One Stop Shop. Take up of the scheme is proving immensely popular.
- The Borough's 2009 Recycling Calendar is now being sent out to residents, keeping them up-to-date about collection times over Christmas and the New Year.

### **Trini Crake**

Portfolio Holder for the Environment



## Portfolio Holder Report for Planning & Regeneration

Northampton Borough Council

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

### Market Square

A key priority for the coming months is the delivery of improvements to the Market Square. We expect changes to the layout and new covers for stalls to be completed by April 2009. Under this council's improvement plans, all market traders will retain their spaces, with further spaces available subject to demand.

In spite of the usual pronouncements in the press – including from members of this council – we remain confident that these changes will, for the first time in a long time, recapture the Market Square's sense of purpose as a civic space and provide a welcome focus for public entertainment in the town centre at evenings and weekends. A second phase of improvements will be completed next Autumn; this will include a new seating area and canopies for food stalls.

### **Gold Street**

West Northants Development Corporation (WNDC) and Northants County Council have now announced that the public realm improvements will begin in Gold Street in January. This work will not interfere with Christmas trade and will at last prove a welcome improvement for the town centre's shoppers.

### Grosvenor/Greyfriars

Negotiations with Legal & General to secure a development agreement for the expansion of the Grosvenor Centre and redevelopment of the Greyfriars Bus station continue despite unprecedented economic problems.

We are working with other partners to secure the public investment necessary to replace the bus station with a better transport facility. A new transport hub in the town centre would see still more investment in Northampton and help create jobs across the construction, retail and service industries.

### Becketts Park

A report on the Becketts Park Masterplan will be considered by Cabinet in the New Year. In the meantime, we will consult on plans to install a new 5-a-side football pitch in lieu of the discarded bowling greens. If approved, the plans would also remove fences and shrubs to improve visibility throughout the park.

### Townscape Heritage Initiative

We have applied for Heritage Lottery funding to support a Northampton Townscape Heritage Initiative to implement architectural work to buildings in the All Saints Conservation Area. Such a measure would be a welcome extra investment for the Market Square and Gold Street and draw more visitors to Northampton in the future.

#### **4. Joint Planning Unit**

The appointment of an interim Head of the Joint Planning Unit (JPU) has provided a new impetus to the JPU to deliver its Core Strategy for West Northants. This new structure to deliver the Local Development Scheme together with the budget required for the next three years will be presented to the Joint Planning Committee on the 16<sup>th</sup> December 2008. I will keep Council informed on the JPU's work programme.

**Richard Church**

Portfolio Holder for Planning & Regeneration



## Portfolio Holder Report for Performance

### Northampton Borough Council

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

#### Performance Reporting

Monthly and quarterly performance reports to Cabinet have been in place since May 2007. Following the successful application of the Performance Plus framework to our Regeneration service last year, we are looking to support the Borough's performance and risk management systems using Performance Plus to ensure we achieve better value for money across our services. To support the 2009/10 planning process, a corporate approach to service planning has been established; every service area will receive the training necessary to support this in the next three months.

#### ICT

The Borough's website provides a first port-of-call for council services for residents across the town. A development group has now been established to drive forward improvements to our online facilities and make sure the information we provide is clear and accessible to everyone.

Further work continues on the use of our Customer Relationship Manager (CRM) system, including analysis for the implementation of a new 'change of circumstance' facility. Once implemented, this change will provide customers with a single procedure to simplify the process of notification for changes of name, address, employment status and the like to services across this council. As ever, this council continues to review its procedures to make them quicker and more customer-friendly.

The PC replacement programme is progressing well, replacing many of the council's older machines. Some computers have already been donated to local charities, and others, to groups in Malawi via the Northampton Rotary Club. Our thanks go to the local Rotary Club branch for help making this possible.

#### Customer Service Operations

Throughout National Customer Services Week (6-10<sup>th</sup> October 2008) customer exit surveys were undertaken; customer feedback was high, with 97% reporting a positive experience from our services.

Results from the One Stop Shop were lower – though still good – with 80% reporting a positive experience. These results will be incorporated into the Customer Services Strategy and action taken to address the areas of concern to our customers.

#### **Human Resources**

Senior Management Restructuring is nearly complete. Most vacancies at senior level have now been filled and we hope to have a complement of top staff in place in the New Year. We continue to review how best to attract high calibre candidates for all our posts.

The Borough's Pay and Grading project has now begun. The aim of the project is to implement a fair pay scheme for our staff. This is a project local authorities from across the country will have to implement. We will complete our project by April 2009.

### **Legal Services**

Legal Services are working towards compliance with the Lexcel quality standard, approved by the Law Society of England and Wales. The formal Lexcel Assessment Inspection took place on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2008, which we will report back on in due course.

### **Electoral Registration**

The annual canvass of the Electoral Register is moving into its final stage with a team of canvassers due to visit addresses from which no response has been received. This will help ensure that everyone eligible to vote has been invited to register, in advance of County and European elections in June 2009.

### **Licensing**

Licensing was involved with multi-agency checks of private hire and Hackney carriages on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2008. 26% of vehicles were found to be un-roadworthy, with a further 70% found to have more minor faults. Two subsequent operations in November resulted in six private hire drivers having their licenses suspended or receiving cautions. This programme of checks have resulted in a decline in the number of offences committed and has reinforced the standard set by the Borough's Licensing Committee for these vehicles.

### **Information Management**

The revised Publication Scheme under section 19 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 is on tonight's council agenda. Freedom of Information requests continue to prove popular this year – not least with opposition members of this council – requiring more of the council's resources. Again, as members of this council will be able to testify, the Borough ensures that all requests are responded to within 20 working days.

### **Brian Hoare**

Portfolio Holder for Performance



## Portfolio Holder Report for Finance

### Northampton Borough Council

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

#### Finance

The focus of our finance team has been on preparing the budget 2009/10 – 2011/12. A draft consultation budget will be presented to Cabinet on 22<sup>nd</sup> December. Financial statements will reflect the Borough's new management structure, implemented on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2008, from the financial position to the 31<sup>st</sup> October (Period 7).

Members' training sessions on local government finance were held in November, with 19 members attending. Many thanks to our team for preparing these and for their clear explanations of local government finance today. I would encourage all members to attend future sessions, not least those with pretensions about the state of our projections for next year.

#### Assets

We continue to work with English Partnerships to deliver community facilities at Upton. We are also working in partnership with Ability Northants to ensure that the new Shopmobility facility in the Mayorhold meets their standards.

We have obtained significant business rate refunds in respect of council-owned property in the last two months. The total sum recovered to date exceeds our budget forecasts and will help to improve the overall budget outturn for Asset Management in 2008/9.

#### Procurement Service

The Northamptonshire Area Procurement Service (NAPS) was set up on 3<sup>rd</sup> November with its Head of Service based here at the Borough. Following 'meet and greet' introductions in Northampton, more sessions have been carried out in Corby and Daventry. Initial proposals have been put forward for the interim structures for both NAPS and the Borough's own procurement teams. Seconded inputs from some of the consortium members have also been identified.

An early proposal has been submitted to all consortium partners to sign up for a flexible procurement strategy to purchase gas and electricity at the largest sites. It has been identified that this could save the borough council about £58,000 per annum from September 2009 and is currently being taken forward with our energy procurement advisors.

Seven funding bids for procurement projects have passed initial scrutiny from the sub-regional funding board on behalf of EMIEP (East Midlands Improvement & Efficiency Partnership). The bids have now approved at the Public Services Board releasing £1.6m worth of savings across Northamptonshire authorities.

Early priorities for NAPS include office building maintenance and telephony contracts but initial emphasis will be centred on data collection and analysis to identify the target areas to inform a business plan.

## Revenues & Benefits

Performance remains on target from collection rates and processing of claims, however we have started to notice an increase in caseload caused by the current economic climate, which will continue to be monitored.

The Voice Recognition Analysis software continues to be used for the review of cases and change of circumstances. This is part of a year long pilot scheme for the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) in partnership with Wellingborough, Corby and Kettering.

Work to begin implementing e-benefits for new claims began this month.

An initial discussion has been held with Daventry and Wellingborough district councils about joining the Business Rates Consortium, which should realise savings on expenditure for both authorities. A meeting was held on 4<sup>th</sup> December with a view to preparing a business case to move this forward.

### **Malcolm Mildren**

Portfolio Holder for Finance