

**Council  
Monday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2009**

**Portfolio Holder Presentations**

---

1. Report of the Leader of the Council, Portfolio Holder for Partnerships and Improvement (Page 1)
2. Report of the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement & Safety (Page 3)
3. Report of the Portfolio Holder for Housing (Page 5)
4. Report of the Portfolio Holder for Environment (Page 8)
5. Report of the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration (Page 11)
6. Report of the Portfolio Holder for Performance (Page 13)
7. Report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance (Page 16)



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

**Northampton Borough Council**

**Monday 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2009**

### IDeA Peer Review

The council has now received the final report of the IDeA Peer Review. This will be considered fully by Cabinet on 4<sup>th</sup> February.

Broadly the review shows that the Council has made very strong progress over the past 20 months. It confirms that the Council now has strong political and managerial leadership in place. It makes specific reference to the 'traditional' management structure, headed by professional experts, as being 'exactly the right approach'.

It makes special mention of the 'dramatic improvement in the finance service following the appointment of a new Director of Finance in March 2007.

The report identifies a number of 'Areas for Consideration'. There are no surprises but these provide a clear list of key challenges facing the Council. In particular, it confirms earlier reports by the IDeA and the Audit Commission that the Council does too much and expresses concern that the Council does not prioritise sufficiently well. In particular, it comments that our non-priorities are poorly identified.

The report includes 15 recommendations. These will be considered by Cabinet but my initial impression is that these are sensible and should be followed.

### Government Monitoring Board

The Government Monitoring Board met on 15<sup>th</sup> January (after this report was prepared). I will provide an update at the Council meeting.

### Local Leader's Board

The Sub National Review (SNR) proposed a Local Leader's Board to provide a level of 'democratic oversight' for the East Midlands Development Agency after the East Midland's Regional Assembly is wound up.

I can report that the Minister for the East Midlands, Phil Hope MP, wrote to the Chair of the East Midlands Regional Assembly on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2008 providing very clear guidance that a 9 + 5 model for the Local Leader's Board should be preferred. To translate, his preference was for the nine County and Unitary Councils to have a guaranteed place on the Board and for one District

Council per County to be nominated to represent the District Councils within the County.

Because government in the SNR failed to recognise the position of District Councils within local government, preferring to only recognise 'top tier' County and Unitary Councils the original proposals were for a Local Leader's Board comprising only the nine County and Unitary Authorities in the East Midlands. Lobbying by District Councils has secured some representation. Given that District Councils have key responsibilities for planning policy, housing strategy and economic development it made no sense for Districts to be excluded.

However, despite considerable lobbying, the result of this decision is that the fourth largest city/town within the East Midlands with a population in excess of 200,000 people – soon to grow to the third largest – will have no place at the table as of right. I believe this leaves both town and county intolerably underrepresented at regional level.

Northamptonshire District Leaders have nominated Cllr. Sandra Barnes, Leader of South Northamptonshire District Council, to represent Northamptonshire District Councils at the Local Leader's Board.

**Tony Woods**

Leader of the Council

Portfolio Holder for Partnerships & Improvement



## Portfolio Holder Report for Community Engagement & Safety

Northampton Borough Council

Monday 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2009

### Northampton Safer Stronger Partnership & Community Safety

I am pleased to report that Northampton Safer Stronger Partnership (NSSP) has received a grant from the Home Office to fund the appointment of a Neighbourhood Crime and Justice Co-ordinator to undertake pioneering work to reduce crime and disorder in the town.

A Community Safety and Health Improvement Officer Partnership has been appointed. This post is jointly funded with the Northamptonshire Primary Care Trust and will further develop the Community Safety role in drug and alcohol misuse issues.

The excellent work of the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit is ongoing, with one Anti-Social Behaviour Order and a further Criminal Anti-Social Behaviour Order being granted in December.

### Culture and Leisure Services

Culture and Leisure Services are now part of the Environment and Culture Directorate to promote Leisure, Sport, Play and Cultural activity.

### **The improvement of this Council's Leisure Services is increasingly being recognised:**

- Lings Forum successfully renewed its QUEST Registration following an assessment in November. Quest is the UK Quality Scheme for Sport and Leisure.
- Danes Camp was nominated as a finalist by APSE (the Association for Public Service Excellence) in the Most Improved Performer category at its Annual Performance Networks Awards 2008.
- Mounts Baths won an Accessibility Award in Northampton under a joint initiative of the town's Disabled People's Forum and Ability Northants. Danes Camp Leisure Centre came runner-up in the awards' Leisure Services category.

Play Rangers carried out their first 'Wicked' Play Day, funded by The Big Lottery. The day's activities took place at the Camrose Sure Start Centre and Earl Spencer Primary School and attracted over 70 children and young people living from the Spencer area.

Play Development Workers are delivering 'Positive Play' training to lunchtime supervisors in Earls Spencer and Kings Heath Primary schools. Positive Play aims to improve lunchtime play provision and opportunities within primary schools. This Council hopes to continue to support these and other initiatives to enhance the opportunities of our town's young people.

The Sports and Physical Activity Team have started new weekly health walks in Eastfield and Spencer. The number of weekly walkers has been encouraging to date and we hope numbers to increase still further.

The Sports Development Team is working with the local PCT to provide weight management courses for people across the town.

A new consultation group – Sport 4 Youth – has been set up by the Council's Sports Development Team with a view to encouraging more of our teenagers to really get into sport.

### Events, Museums and Arts

Over the Christmas period, the Council's The Events Team contributed to events including:

- A Christmas parade and Fireworks with the Town Centre Partnership.
- Carols around the town's Christmas decorations with the local churches.
- A Synthetic Ice Rink and entertainment area on the Market Square with the Youth Forum, funded by Money 4 Youth.
- The Victorian Christmas with the St Giles Street traders.

The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council's Designation Team visited our Designated Collection of Shoes. They were very impressed with what we have done in the exhibition areas and the stores.

The Council has been awarded a grant of £3,000 from Renaissance East Midlands for digital equipment to improve the quality and use of our digital images. This will mean ever more candid photographs of residents, participants and Councillors on the Borough Council's website!

Following on from the success of the Venezia! Festival, I am pleased to report that the Council has launched the Shoetown Festival, for which sponsorship is being sought.

**Brendan Glynane**

Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement & Safety



## Portfolio Holder Report for Housing

Northampton Borough Council

Monday 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2009

### Housing PFI

The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) visited us on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> January to discuss our bid for PFI funds. Northampton was only the second town to be seen by HCA and our thanks go to officers for ensuring its success.

This council understands that the latest slice of PFI funding available runs to £2bn, with up to £4bn having been bid for by 24 authorities. The Directorate hopes to receive final notification of the success of the council's Expression of Interest by early Summer.

All tenants and leaseholders in the areas proposed to receive these funds have received a leaflet outlining what PFI could mean for their homes, families and communities. Residents will soon be invited to a workshop to discuss the implications of a successful bid.

### Choice Based Lettings

I am pleased with the council's progress to date on Choice Based Lettings. We continue to work well with Daventry District Council to formulate a new scheme. Proposals for a joint allocations policy will be seen by councillors in Daventry next month and we hope for this scheme to go 'live' by the end of the year. This scheme would give families living both in and outside Northampton greater choice about where they want to live.

### Disabled Facilities Grants

I am pleased to report that the council is investing £1.3m this year in Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs). This investment makes the world of difference to real people, who need the support of this council to maintain their independence at difficult times in their lives. I am pleased also that the Government Office for the East Midlands (GOEM) has chosen to support us with a grant of £422,000 for 2009/10.

Our officers continue to do sterling work in making sure disabled residents have their homes adapted quickly and efficiently. I am delighted to report that all outstanding cases for DFGs have now been cleared, and that all new cases moving forward are being met inside the government's statutory limit.

### Pay and Productivity

Negotiations are ongoing with Trade Unions to reach an agreement on certain ancillary aspects of the Pay and Productivity Local Agreement for our tradesmen and women. I am confident that this new agreement will be in place by 1st April, as planned, and that we will see a real change in staff performance and morale as a result.

I am confident that sensible arrangements with the unions can be agreed in future and that they, like members of this council, recognise that further changes must still be made to ensure taxpayers in Northampton get the very best value-for-money.

### Temporary Accommodation

I am pleased to report that fewer families than ever are in temporary accommodation. 60 households were in Temporary Accommodation on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2008, compared to 196 on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006. This represents a 40% decrease since the start of April 2008. Given the economic downturn, this is particularly welcome news. As ever, we remain vigilant that families in the greatest need continue to get the help they deserve.

### Rent Arrears

Arrears have now fallen below £1.5m for the first time in 5 years. On current collection rates, we are on course to achieve our lowest year-end figure in living memory. There is, of course, no cause for complacency as the recession makes life more difficult for families across Northampton to meet their household bills.

This council will take a hard line with those who, for no good reason, do not pay up. I am all too aware that as many as two thirds of tenants do pay their rent on time and that this, in the end, carries a cost to this council and the town's other taxpayers. That is why we will bring forward proposals to offer incentives to tenants to pay, on time, to Cabinet next month. It is too early to tell, however, if we will achieve our ambition to improve rent collection rates by March. Improving rent collection rates is still a top priority – we hope to make 2009 the year that this council broke with the past over certain tenants' late and non-payments.

### 'Staff rise to challenge'

A special thanks go to our Call Care and Sheltered Living Service staff who responded superbly to a power cut in Melbourne House, Abbey House and Devonshire House on New Year's Day.

All vulnerable residents were visited promptly to make sure they were safe and well; a hot meal was provided, and alternative accommodation was offered. Close working with E.ON meant that residents' heating was restored

by early evening. Nonetheless, it is reassuring to know that our staff are so well prepared in times of crisis.

**Sally Beardsworth**

Portfolio Holder for Housing





## Portfolio Holder Report for the Environment

Northampton Borough Council

Monday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2009

### Carbon Management

During November, NBC held a forum at each of the main sites – Westbridge, Cliftonville and the Guildhall. All staff and Save It Campaigners were invited and were given a presentation on the Council's Carbon Management Programme. The proposed internal Green Office Guide was introduced and suggestions from attendees for its content was discussed and recorded. The guide will be aimed at all staff and will focus on reducing waste, energy efficiency, waste conservation, green travel options and sustainable procurement. The council's voluntary Save It Campaigners network continues to grow and now has representatives in many areas of the council which will help drive changes in behaviour contained in the green office guide to help reduce the council's energy usage in the future.

### Environmental Protections

As you may recall last year new legislation came into force that gave councils the option to adopt legal powers for the control of dogs. At that time the council updated the existing legal powers it already had to requiring dog owners to clean up after their dogs fouled in a public place. This new legislation also gave the council the option to introduce new controls; for requiring dogs to be put on a lead in certain areas or by request of an authorised officer; to exclude dogs from specified areas; restrict the number of dogs an individual could take out alone in certain places. In the autumn the public were consulted on the need to introduce these new powers in Northampton, this was followed by a Councillor consultation on this issue in their wards. This is now complete and I am grateful to those councillors that returned the consultation maps and made comments. All comments and proposals are now being reviewed and the matter will be reported upon next month.

### Food/Health and Safety

The work that NBC does with the local food businesses is reported to the Food Standards Agency each year. This year there is a new Food Standards Agency reporting system that is under trial with the direct submission of data from our database to theirs. Most data is transferring successfully with a few minor issues still to be resolved before the end of March 09.

## Neighbourhood Issues

Areas that have been identified as having the worst refuse problems (such as putting out refuse bags too early or and in particular using bags and not their bins or using bags in addition to their bins) will have targeted enforcement during the coming months. Thorplands estate has been identified as having one of the worst problems at the moment and the certain streets in this area will be targeted for action on 26<sup>th</sup> January, when a joint exercise will be carried out between the area's wardens and street cleansing staff.

Letters will be delivered next week to remind residents about their responsibilities and refer them to the Section 46 Notices that were served on all properties in the eastern district during 2008. Section 46 Notices explain how residents should dispose of their rubbish and gives clear instructions about putting refuse out for collection and recycling. If evidence is found the offenders will risk receiving a fixed penalty notice of £100.00 and failure to pay this can result in court action and a greater fine.

## Street Scene

The first phase of the memorial rose garden involving the hard landscaping of the area is now completed. Plants are currently being purchased and we are working with our Press and PR department on how the public can make a donation to have a rose planted in memorial. The original board of names from donations made has now been removed from the old rose garden and is currently being refurbished and will be placed in the new garden.

27 diseased trees are to be removed from Abington Park due to Bleeding Canker. A programme to replace the trees with a different species will be put in place.

## Domestic Waste & Recycling

As a partner of the Northamptonshire Waste Partnership, the Cabinet approved a Service Level Agreement at its meeting of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December which will see the procurement of a waste reduction facility that will allow all the Councils within the county to reduce the amount of waste that is tipped as landfill.

Prices for recycled materials remained stable during December, although at a comparatively lower level than in past months. The market is predicting that prices may start to rise during the second quarter of 2009.

In support of the Council's waste minimisation targets the Council's 'green' educational programme has been a great success over the last year with an almost three fold increase in visits to the Materials Reclamation Facility, and approximately 20% increase in the number of events held and talks made. In addition officers carryout waste audits for businesses and households in helping them to increase the amount they recycle.

This Christmas and New Year waste collections were dealt with in a different way to previous years and has proved very successful with only three 3 official complaints currently recorded and passed through to Waste Services.

**Trini Crake**

Portfolio Holder for the Environment



## **Portfolio Holder Report for Planning & Regeneration**

**Northampton Borough Council**

**Monday 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2009**

### Sixfields

Members will have read in the press about Sixfields. The Council has not changed its position. We remain committed to working with the football club and property owners at Sixfields to agree a Masterplan for the future development of the area in accordance with planning policy. At the meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> December it was agreed that the football club and partners would review their options for land uses and they are welcome to discuss their commercial options with the Council's Director of Planning and Regeneration. This commitment was confirmed in writing to the football club and development partners on 11<sup>th</sup> December. We understand that such discussions are being progressed between the development partners and our Director of Planning and Regeneration will be pleased to consider them as soon as they are ready for submission.

We have also recently received an appeal decision in respect of out of town centre retail development at Sixfields (North of the Weedon Road) that has been dismissed. In dismissing the appeal the Inspector found that the applications would not accord with national guidance in PPS6 and would be unacceptably harmful to the vitality and viability of Northampton Town Centre.

We will continue not to place at risk the future of the town centre for the sake of out of town retail development. For the record the council have not dismissed a garden centre in principle, nor have we said that no development can take place before 2026.

### Conservation Areas

Cabinet has recently agreed to small changes to Collingtree Conservation Area and we are now consulting on significant changes to Kingsley and Hardingstone Conservation Areas. We will take carefully into account all responses before progressing with any changes.

### Market Square

Work is progressing on the purchase of demountable stalls and new canopies for the market square. The proposed layout has been confirmed, and a number of points made by the traders have been taken on board. The new layout maintains the flexibility to include more stalls if demand improves, and to alter the layout depending upon the need and activities on the square.

Tenders have been invited for caterers, and we look forward to an improved catering offer with new seating and canopies.

#### Brackmills Business Improvement District

I have been invited to join the shadow board of the proposed Brackmills Business Improvement District (BID). Businesses in Brackmills are working with the Council and Northamptonshire Enterprises Ltd to make improvements to the Industrial estate, such as improved security and environmental maintenance. Businesses will have an opportunity later this year to vote to raise a small supplementary business rate to fund this work. WNDC have already agreed to fund a new CCTV system for the estate.

#### **Richard Church**

Portfolio Holder for Planning & Regeneration



## Portfolio Holder Report for Performance

Northampton Borough Council

Monday 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2009

### Legal Services

The assessment of the Legal Department by the Law Society undertaken in December lead to positive feedback from the assessor of the processes and standards of operation within the Councils Legal department. The council has been advised that the Law Society has confirmed that the council has achieved LEXEL accreditation.

### Licensing

To improve the protection of the public a new style badge for Hackney and Private Hire drivers has been introduced. The new badge in the style of a credit card is more secure with a photograph of the driver and therefore cannot be easily copied. The driver's badge should always be on display in the vehicle and passengers can now be more confident that a properly authorised driver operating the vehicle.

The department continues to monitor the operation of licenses issued and carried out further random checks in the run up to Christmas working with officers from Northamptonshire Road Policing Unit, VOSA (Vehicle and Operator Services Agency) and HM Revenue and Customs held a Taxi/Private Hire vehicle check in Northampton.

Immediate prohibitions preventing the user of the vehicles for hire were issued for offences including illegal tyres, lighting offences, suspension faults, dangerous parts and faulty seat belts, Several drivers were cautioned with regard to breaches of Council Conditions such as the display of badges.

### Freedom of Information

307 FOI requests were responded to in 2008. This was a 60% increase compared to 2007. Only 7 of these responses were challenged (>2.5%) and no requests were appealed to the Information Commissioner.

### Publication Scheme

The revised Publication Scheme was launched on the website on 2<sup>nd</sup> January. The area it sits in will be redesigned for the updated website to be launched towards the end of February.

## Customer Service Operations

Formal consultation has commenced regarding the proposed change in arrangements for making cash payments to the Borough Council. Customers will be able to use a range of payzone outlets and post offices throughout the town providing them with a wider range of options and eliminating the need to travel to a specific council office.

This new approach to cash payments represents much better value for money for the local council tax payer and initial results from the customer surveys conducted is positive.

The One Stop Shop is developing the use of scanners to enable it to scan more documentation from customers at the first point of contact. This will enable an improved services to customers, in particular those applying for housing and council tax benefits.

The Council is seeking to improve the value for money of the postal communication to residents. A new Post office Clean Mail contract which would save the Council 2.9p per second-class mail item is under consideration and would offset the planned general 2<sup>nd</sup> Class mail increase of 3p planned from in April 2009. It is hoped to commence the new contract prior to the Council tax mailing in early March.

## ICT

An upgrade to the Council's website is being tested but is not at this stage available to the public. The new system will provide opportunities to improve the facilities and information available to the general public.

Development will take place over the coming months to enhance the website facilities and expand the opportunity to communicate electronically with the Council.

## Performance Management

Work continues on the roll out of the new Performance+ system to support the Council's performance management system in 2009/2010. The new system will provide greater efficiency with the benefit of a central database of performance data that can be "input once and used many times"

The Peer Review report following the inspection undertaken in October last year has been received by the Council and publicised. The report identifies the progress that the Council has been making and comments that there is now "a strong political and managerial leadership team in place". The report also identifies areas where the Council need to continue to develop, including the need to review the range and breadth of its priorities with the need to be prepared to do less in order to achieve a higher level of services for the Citizens of Northampton.

External assessment of the Council continues with the annual Direction of Travel assessment by the Audit Commission starting W/c 12<sup>th</sup> January and an Access to Services assessment starting on the 9<sup>th</sup> March. All external assessments require considerable preparation work and the production by the Performance Team of a self-assessment prior to the inspection.

### Human Resources

The results of the Staff Survey will be issued shortly and they support the positive findings highlighted in the Peer Review of an improving organisation with committed staff.

### **Brian Hoare**

Portfolio Holder for Performance





## Portfolio Holder Report for Finance

### Northampton Borough Council

Monday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2009

#### Finance

Finance's main focus has been on the draft budget that was approved at Cabinet for consultation on the 22nd December. Work is currently being undertaken in Finance to assist services to close the existing budget gap.

#### Northampton Theatres Trust

Having satisfactorily resolved some conservation issues, the council is working closely with The Northampton Theatres Trust to undertake phase II of the roof works approved previously in 2008. This will involve renewing a section of the Royal Theatre roof with an enhanced roofing system, improving thermal performance. This work should be on site shortly.

#### Benefit Processing

Continues to be delivered in accordance with targets – 16 days new, 8 days changes. Other authorities have already seen increased workloads as a result of the recession. As previously reported, we are closely monitoring our active caseload and will keep members abreast of developments.

#### E-Benefits

The Benefits Service is working closely with Customer Services to implement E Benefits software. This software will enable customers to make a claim for Housing or Council Tax benefits, or report a change in their circumstances electronically. It will also enable customer service staff to provide benefit customers with a high level eligibility assessment to various other welfare benefits such as child benefit, child tax credits, carers allowance, incapacity benefit/employment support allowance.

#### Business Rates

Collection rates for Northampton and Wellingborough have dropped as at the end of December. We have noticed a decline in payments from established businesses and that every call essentially complains about the state of the economy. In addition, the excess empty property rates payable by owners of empty properties has hit this year and this has led to problems.

We are being pro-active and chasing all cases. In addition, we remain 3% above East Northants and 1.5% above Kettering for collection rates.

**Malcolm Mildren**, Portfolio Holder for Finance