

SCRUTINY

NEWSLETTER



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ISSUE 8 SEPTEMBER 2009

introduction

Welcome to the **September 2009** edition of the Overview and Scrutiny Newsletter. This is the eighth edition and in it we would like to update you on the latest developments on Scrutiny here in Northampton.

We also want to alert you to reports and meetings, which may be of interest to you. If you have any questions about the Scrutiny function, or about how to get involved, please email Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, at ttiff@northampton.gov.uk who will be very happy to respond to your query.

Further information can also be found on the Overview and Scrutiny WebPages www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny.

If you have any questions or comments on this Newsletter, please contact the Scrutiny Officer:-

 **Telephone** 01604 8374108

 **Email** ttiff@northampton.gov.uk



Councillor Andrew Simpson
Chair, Overview and Scrutiny
Management Committee

a word from

the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Welcome to the eighth of our Scrutiny Newsletters. Since the publication of the last Newsletter the Committees and its Task and Finish Groups have continued with their busy schedule details of which are published later in the Newsletter. Important issues are highlighted for your information.

Recently, Councillors met to look at the Overview and Scrutiny structure in accordance with its dedicated resources. The workshop was very successful and the Group will reconvene again in September to propose a new Overview and Scrutiny structure to full Council. Further details will be provided in a future Newsletter.

I hope that many of you will take the opportunity to become involved in our Scrutiny work, through attending and addressing the Committees, writing to the Task and Finish Groups or becoming a witness, to mention but a few.

What's happening in Overview and Scrutiny?

Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee continues to make progress on the areas of work identified in the Work Programme at the beginning of the Council year.

Overview and Scrutiny Reviews

Contaminated Water Task and Finish Group

Phase two of the Group's work to *Review the Drinking Water Inspectorate's report* has been completed.

The Task and Finish Group along with representatives from Daventry District Council, Wellingborough Borough Council and Northamptonshire County Council, reviewed the Drinking Water Inspectorate's report acknowledging recommendations made. The Group also had a site visit to Pitsford works to see where the problem occurred and the remedial measures put in place.



The final report was presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 20 May 2009 and the Task and Finish Group asks Cabinet to note that: -

- Anglian Water Limited has installed sufficient measures to prevent such an incident occurring in the same manner at Pitsford Water Treatment Works.
- The review of the Drinking Water Inspectorate's report and the tour of Pitsford Works concludes the work of the Task and Finish Group.

Evaluation of the Overview and Scrutiny Operation at Northampton

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee instructed the Overview and Scrutiny Officer to undertake an evaluation of the Overview and Scrutiny function at Northampton Borough Council (NBC) using the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) self evaluation framework.

The evaluation came out with some very positive issues regarding the Overview and Scrutiny process. Full Council received the Self Evaluation report at its meeting on **2 March 2009**.

The findings from the self-evaluation framework were used as the basis for developing an Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan. A workshop for all O&S Councillors was held early in May 2009 which put together the Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan, which could then be used to: -

- Demonstrate Scrutiny's value to auditors and inspectors
- Encourage involvement in the process of those being scrutinised
- Communicate the potential of Scrutiny to local communities
- Build confidence of those undertaking Scrutiny activities

A further workshop took place early in August 2009 for Councillors to recommend to full Council at its meeting on 26 October 2009 a fit for purpose Overview and Scrutiny structure in accordance with:-

- Its dedicated resources
- Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan

Details of the outcome of this workshop will be provided in a future Scrutiny newsletter.

West Northants Development Corporation (WNDC) and Partnership working with Northampton Borough Council (NBC)

The purpose of the Review was to establish how well WNDC is performing and how well Northampton Borough Council and WNDC are working together in partnership to deliver the regeneration, planning and growth objectives for the town. The report, together with its 19 recommendations, was well received by Cabinet at its meeting on **25 February 2009** and will a response will be given to Overview and Scrutiny in due course.

Concessionary Bus Fares Appreciative Inquiry

A group of Councillors from Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 are investigating the implications of extending the hours, which Concessionary Bus Passes are in operation including costs. This Review is currently at its evidence gathering stage and is scheduled to report the findings to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 in the autumn 2009.

Customer Services Task and Finish Group

The purpose of this Review was to evaluate the success of investments made in Customer Services since 2005. The Task and Finish Group agreed that the following needed to be investigated and linked to the realisation of the Council's corporate priorities:

- A synopsis of all information available
- Results of surveys undertaken
- Performance Indicator Statistics
- Evidence from the Portfolio Holder (Performance)
- Evidence from key Northampton Borough Council employees
- Visits to Best Practice Councils Kettering Borough Council and Milton Keynes Council
- Desktop Research
- Visits to internal services observing process and speaking to employees and visitors: -
 - One Stop Shop
 - Call Centre
 - Switchboard
 - Cliftonville reception
 - Weston Favell Housing Office
 - Kingsthorpe Housing Office

Following comprehensive evidence gathering, the Group's final report was presented to Cabinet at its meeting on **20 May 2009**.



More Facilities for Older Children

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees asked the public to suggest issues for inclusion onto the work programme 2008/2009. Questionnaires were circulated at the town's Balloon Festival in August 2008. The management committee evaluated the suggestions and produced a ballot form containing the top ten issues. At the Local Democracy Week event held at the Guildhall, a vote took place for the item for inclusion onto the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme - More Facilities for Older Children obtained the most votes.

The Review commencing in February and is due to conclude in September 2009 the purpose is to find out the facilities/activities currently available, what young people suggest should be provided and to produce a GAP analysis.

The Review is coming to a close and is due to report its finding to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee at its meeting on **28 September 2009**.

Reporting and Monitoring Working Group

An Overview and Scrutiny working group was set up to investigate the budget proposals. Once implemented it will monitor the effects of the budget changes and report back. In the autumn, it will again investigate any budget proposals for 2010/2011 and will, later during 2010, monitor any effect.

Choice Based Lettings System

An Appreciative Inquiry has just completed its findings and will submit its report on this system to Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Further details will be given in the next newsletter.

Cost of Consultants to the Authority

A Review of the Cost of Consultants to the Authority has been on the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for a time and it was agreed that the Review would commence June 2009.

The Review was originally assigned to the parent Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 (Partnerships, Regeneration, Community Engagement and Safety) but on further development of the remit of the Group it was determined that the Review was now closer to the remit of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 (Performance, Improvement and Finance). Following discussions with the Chair of both

Committees and the Chair of the Task and Finish Group it was agreed that it would be a joint Review reporting to both Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 and 3.

The Task and Finish Group has held its initial scoping meeting and will now commence on its evidence gathering. It is aimed that the final report will be produced by April 2010.



A library of completed Reviews can be viewed on the Council's website:
www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny.

Scrutiny of the Emergent Joint Core Strategy

During August 2009 Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 (Partnerships, Regeneration, Community Engagement and Safety) led a short, sharp Review scrutinising the emergent Joint Core Strategy. All other Members of the Council were invited to partake in Scrutiny Review. A number of the public addressed the Committee as did other Members of the Council. The Committee's final report, which recommends Northampton Borough Council's response to the consultant on the Emergent Joint Core Strategy will be presented to full Council at its meeting on **8th September 2009**.

Sheltered Housing and Housing Options for Older People

A Task and Finish Group made up of Councillors from Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 (Housing and Environment) will scope its Review early in the autumn 2009. Further details of which will be provided in the next Scrutiny newsletter.



Copies of all Overview and Scrutiny Review Reports can be located www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2008/2009

Full Council at its meeting on 13 July 2009 received the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2008/09. The fourth Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report covers the 2008/09 Municipal Year and it aims to provide a succinct summary of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees appointed, as well as the main issues scrutinised during the course of the year.



Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2009/2010

Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee develops its own Work Programme at the beginning of the Municipal Year. The Work Programme and the timings of the Reviews are agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. The Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2009/2010 is published on the Scrutiny webPages.

Countywide Joint Scrutiny

The Council has two Scrutiny Councillors, Councillors Jamie Lane and John Yates, representing it on the Countywide Joint Scrutiny Forum. This Forum is currently operating on a shadow basis.

Councillor Jamie Lane and the Council's Scrutiny Officer have been actively involved in the production of the terms of reference for this Forum.

Other functions of Scrutiny

It is important to remember that Scrutiny is not just about carrying out Reviews. Overview and Scrutiny has other powers which include:-

- Provide a constructive challenge to the way decisions are made, reviewing service delivery and advising on policy
- Councillor Call for Action (CCfA)
- Carry out reality checks
- Monitoring role monitoring the Council's key performance indicators and identify and investigate significant variances from the targets set
- Monitor the implementation of recommendations accepted by the Executive that are contained in Overview and Scrutiny report
- Scrutiny is also about helping the Council to engage with local citizens, partners, other organisations and business and the Voluntary Sector to improve the quality of life in Northampton

Further information on Overview and Scrutiny and how it operates at Northampton can be found in the Overview and Scrutiny Toolkit, which is published on the Scrutiny pages of the Council's Website.

Councillor Call for Action

Ward Councillors have been given a new power entitled Councillor Call for Action (CCfA). This new power allows residents to refer problems to their ward Councillor and ask that they try to resolve the problem. If the Councillor has difficulties in resolving their problem they can ask for it to be investigated as a CCfA. The issue does not have to relate just to the Council, but can be in respect of local Agencies or partners, for example the Police. When an issue, under CCfA, is raised it must be put on a Scrutiny Committee agenda. The relevant Scrutiny Committee will gather evidence on this issue before it makes any recommendations. Although CCfA does not guarantee the problem to be solved it gives local residents an opportunity to ask Scrutiny to look at issues where all other attempts to resolve it have failed.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny has recently published its guidance for the Councillor Call for Action (CCfA). This guidance document was commissioned by Communities and Local Government through the IDeA.

The guidance covers the key issues needed to be able to implement CCfA provisions effectively. The guidance focuses on how CCfA fits in with other Council processes such as complaints, as well as the opportunities that it provides to plug scrutiny in to intelligence garnered through public involvement and neighbourhood working. There is also guidance on section 236 of the Act, which explains how Council functions can be delegated to individual Councillors, and suggestions are given as to how this provision and CCfA can be used together. It is emphasised by the CfPS that this work is the official guidance on this particular statutory provision. The department of Communities and Local Government is not supplementing it with their own guidance.



The guidance is published on the Centre for Public Scrutiny's website www.cfps.org.

The Local Government and Public Involvement Act 2007

the CCfA powers as detailed above also extends Councils' Scrutiny powers in other ways, including:-

Information from Partner Agencies and Authorities

Scrutiny Committees will be able to require partner Agencies to provide information.



Reports, Recommendations and Responses

The Local Government and Public Involvement Act 2007 places a duty on the Council and its Cabinet to respond to Scrutiny reports and recommendations. The Act also places a duty on certain partner Authorities to have regard to a Scrutiny report or their recommendations.

At NBC, a process is in place whereby Cabinet will provide its response to a Scrutiny report within two meetings of receiving the report.

Requiring the attendance of decision making

Scrutiny Committees already have the power to require relevant Cabinet Members and Officers to attend meetings and provide evidence. The Act enables Councils to devolve some powers to Councillors to exercise within their wards. Scrutiny Committees will be able to require any such Councillor who has been given such powers.

How to get Involved

There are a number of ways in which you can find out about the work of Overview and Scrutiny.



If you want to know more please refer to the Overview and Scrutiny WebPages on the Council's website under Council, Government and Democracy:
www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny

Forthcoming meetings

All Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings are held in public and anyone is welcome to attend. Agendas and minutes are published on the Council's website under Council, Government and Democracy.

Meetings commence at **6pm** and are held in the **Jeffery Room**, at the **Guildhall**

Dates for your diary

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1	Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2	Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee
<input type="checkbox"/> 12 October	<input type="checkbox"/> 21 October	<input type="checkbox"/> 12 November	<input type="checkbox"/> 29 September
2010	2010	2010	<input type="checkbox"/> 14 December
<input type="checkbox"/> 25 January	<input type="checkbox"/> 8 February	<input type="checkbox"/> 13 January commencing at 7.15pm	2010
<input type="checkbox"/> 19 April	<input type="checkbox"/> 5 May	<input type="checkbox"/> 13 May	<input type="checkbox"/> 29 March
<input type="checkbox"/> 21 June	<input type="checkbox"/> 7 July	<input type="checkbox"/> 22 July	<input type="checkbox"/> 7 June

Who to contact

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee



Councillor Andrew Simpson (Chair)



Councillor Jean Hawkins (Vice Chair)

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 (Housing and Environment)



Councillor Christopher Malpas (Chair)



Councillor Jean Hawkins (Vice Chair)

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 (Partnerships, Regeneration, Community Safety and Engagement)



Councillor Andrew Simpson (Chair)



Councillor Ifty Choudary (Vice Chair)

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 (Improvement, Performance and Finance)



Councillor Jamie Lane (Chair)



Councillor John Yates (Vice Chair)



Feedback Questionnaire

To help us make sure this newsletter is useful and informative, please complete the questions below and return to the Overview and Scrutiny Officer.

Did you find this newsletter useful in understanding the role of Overview and Scrutiny?

If not, why?

Is there anything about this newsletter that you would like to change?

Which article did you find most interesting?

Contact Information

Email address: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ **Postcode:** _____

Please tick this box if you wish to receive information from Northampton Borough Council regarding Overview and Scrutiny.

Thank you for filling in this questionnaire.

