

Northampton Borough Council

Community Leadership Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 22 April 2004

Present: Councillor Glynane (Chair); Councillors Lane, Malpas, Mason, Pritchard & Yates; D McKintosh (co-optee)
M Hunter, Head of Overview & Scrutiny
Councillor Hill, Portfolio Holder
M Swann, Tenant Participation Strategy Manager (Item 7)
S Riley, Federation of Residents' Association

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Acock and Miah.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2004 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

3. Deputations / Public Addresses

There were none.

4. Declarations Of Interest (Including Whipping Declarations)

There were none.

5. Town Twinning

Members were advised that this year saw the 25th anniversary of the twinning with Poitiers and that a visit to Northampton would take place in September. Councillor Hill advised that he had recently joined the Friends of the Twinning Association and that he would push for a higher degree of NBC involvement. He had talked with the Leader of the Council regarding this and it was hoped that NBC would host one or two events.

Members discussed the low-key role of the Borough Council in twinning events and were reminded of previous suggestions by this Committee on how to improve this. Members further discussed whether it was felt that NBC should show more commitment to twinning. While it was agreed that this should be the case, it was noted that any recommendations to the Executive would need to be supported with research and evidence. Councillor Hill advised that the authority was assessed against a number of other towns and that it would be pertinent to investigate other authorities.

Conclusions:

- (a) That the twinning sub-group (Councillors Lane, Mason and Yates, D McKintosh and S Riley) reconvene on 11 May at 6.00pm to establish the recommendations of this Committee.
- (b) That the Mayor and the Chair of the Twinning Association be invited to this meeting.
- (c) That the findings of the working group be reported by e-mail to Committee members.
- (d) That the recommendations be made to the Executive in due course.

6. Co-Optees

André Gonzalez de Savage from Wootton Parish Council was welcomed to the meeting.

The Chair reminded Members that it had been their suggestion to invite Parish Councillors onto the Committee as co-optees. All Parish Councils had been written to and positive responses had been received from both Wootton and Upton Parish Councils.

The Chair's motion to co-opt André Gonzalez, Wootton Parish Council, onto the Committee was carried.

7. Tenant Participation

The Chair introduced M Swann, Tenant Participation Strategy Manager to the meeting.

M Swann gave an overview of the service offered by the Tenant Participation Unit. The tenant participation structure had been established to involve tenants as much as possible in the delivery of housing services. The Customer Panel was the overarching group. This held monthly meetings to examine many housing issues, and was well attended by tenants from all areas of the Borough. Tenants were involved in areas such as repairs and maintenance, allocations and rent. Many schemes had been successful, such as the telephone conference link at the Tenant Participation Panel and the Plain Language group, both of which improved communication.

Members discussed whether working practices applied by the Tenant Participation Unit could be applied to other areas of the council. It was suggested that the 'Plain Language' approach could be applied to many of the standard letters and forms produced by the authority, but it was noted that any changes implemented would need to be monitored by an appropriate officer.

Conclusion: That the recommendation of a 'Plain Language' approach to all standard letters and forms be submitted to the Executive for consideration.

8. Forum Minutes

M Hunter advised that there had been no issues arising from the Forums for the attention of this Committee.

9. Future Work

- Branding of Northampton (referred from Overview and Scrutiny 1)
- Town Twinning – Update
- Forward Plan