

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND GENERAL PURPOSES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 21 September 2004

PRESENT: Councillor M Allen (Chair);
Councillors Acock, Boss, Caswell, Flavell, B. Hoare Roy and Woods (sub for Church)

Councillor Larratt	Portfolio Holder
J. Raven	Economic Development Officer
B. Hill	Chief Accountant
J. Armstrong	Head of Customer Relations
C. Garden	Planning

(none)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received Councillors Church and Malpas.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the Committee held on 15 June 2004 were signed by the Chair.

3. DEPUTATIONS / PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

There were none.

5. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

This had been a major issue raised on Members away weekends at Sedgebrook Hall when a renewal strategy for Northampton had been considered as an important issue.

There was a report that identified Northampton as being not very good in terms of shopping. This was in relation to a shopping survey and the question had been asked what plans and policies, if any, were in place regarding this.

The biggest issue in terms of economic development for the Town at the moment was Grosvenor/Greyfriars and trying to resolve the situation with Legal and General.

All efforts were currently going into this but it was recognised that other areas of the Town also needed regenerating i.e. Kettering Road and therefore the issue needed to be looked at

in the broader context.

It was anticipated that a firm decision as regards Legal and General would be forthcoming by the end of October.

Another major issue in relation to economic development had been the subject of a report to Executive on 13 September on Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.

This had been referred to the Chairs and Deputy Chairs Committee. In turn the issue was being referred to this Overview & Scrutiny Committee which was being asked to scrutinise development of regeneration within the context of this Committee's remit.

The Chair suggested that this be an issue for discussion at the next meeting and that the relevant officers be requested to attend to give an update accordingly.

CONCLUSION: That the position be noted and that economic development be kept as a topic on the future Work Programme of this Committee and that relevant Officers be invited to the next meeting to give an update in terms of Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.

6. COMPLAINTS ANALYSIS

The Head of Customer Relations gave an update on how this Borough Council currently dealt with complaints and proposals to improve culture and behaviours. He explained that one of the ways organisations were judged was how they dealt with complaints in terms of numbers, whether they were dealt with satisfactorily, ombudsmen referrals, etc.

He then outlined the current system for dealing with complaints i.e. who they were referred to etc.

Project S4 in the Recovery Programme recognised the fact that the Council had a complaints procedure in place. This however had not been properly implemented and the reasons for this needed to be resolved.

Meetings had been held across the Authority. The Head of Customer Relations stated that he was opposed to the idea of complaints handling being centralised. Rather they should be handled by the service to which they referred.

The annual letter from the Commission for Local Administration in England referred to complaints procedures and to a training initiative. A response had been sent by the Authority expressing an interest in the training initiative.

Similarly in the letter it had been suggested that the part dealing with the complaints procedure and response time should be drawn to the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee's attention.

In terms of future aspirations the Council should be seen to take a positive attitude to

complaints and complaints should be dealt with promptly and efficiently and in an honest and informative way.

Improvement in services would lead to fewer complaints.

In response to a question the Head of Customer Relations undertook to send out a copy of complaints policy and procedures contained in the Constitution to all members.

Staff attitudes to complaints would be improved and in terms of training there had been some but not sufficient. There would be more training and awareness sessions for members.

He asked that any member report directly to him any instances where they had mystery shopped and were not totally satisfied with the response and service they had received.

Continuous learning and improvement was the key.

It was recognised that this needed to be monitored, as one of the issues from the CPA was that this Authority was not a customer focused Council.

It was noted that last year there had been 28 complaints to the Ombudsman but none had been upheld.

In response to a question as to how employees would know about the complaints procedure it was noted that there was an induction programme.

Issues surrounding race, homophobia and disability would be included in the training.

Emphasis was placed on the fact that it was important for the Borough and the County to work closely on this issue in order to promote a better image of how the public perceived Local Authorities in Northampton/Northamptonshire

CONCLUSION That the position be noted and that an update on progress
: and how the Authority was becoming more customer
focused be made to a future meeting.

7. PERFORMANCE POLICIES

The Recovery Board had been discussing how Overview & Scrutiny Committees could monitor this overall issue.

Reference was made to Key Performance Indicators and to the fact that there was to be a review of this to ensure that the indicators were in line with the Recovery Plan. It was considered useful if the Committee could be updated on this.

The top 25 key performance indicators should have been referred to the Chairs and Deputies Meeting for review.

It was suggested that Overview & Scrutiny 4 be requested to do any coordinating on the Key Performance Indicators and that in conjunction perhaps the Chair and Deputy of this Committee meet with Overview & Scrutiny 4 to discuss the issue accordingly.

CONCLUSION: That a meeting between the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of this Committee and Overview & Scrutiny 4 be arranged as soon as possible to consider the top Key Performance Indicators and that a preference be expressed for an evening meeting, it being noted that all the Key Performance Indicators would need to be available to enable a full discussion on this.

8. SESAME BUSINESS EXCHANGE

This item had been an item on the future work programme for discussion at this meeting in terms of where Sesame was going, what contribution this Authority was making and whether it was getting value for money.

J Raven, Economic Development Officer, was present to report on the item.

In terms of background Sesame was an international network and Northampton was one of the founder members of that network which was established in 1992.

Sesame had now spread across 12 countries and 3 continents. The purpose of Sesame was to make contacts and to import, export, business etc. An international business exchange was held each year in one of the participating countries.

The network encouraged businesses to trade and Northampton had close links with the Chamber of Trade locally.

In terms of its benefit to the Town and Council at this particular point in time Sesame was at a bit of crossroads. It was set up primarily as a business exchange but was more recently expanding and moving towards an educational exchange also. The point of this was to enable the furthering of education and cultural issues although Sesame was still primarily linked to business.

At present there were some reservations but steps were being taken to actively pursue and look at refocusing Sesame with emphasis on business.

It was noted that annually £5,000 was budgeted for Sesame with the annual subscription being £650.

The Committee would be kept advised of any further progress and development.

CONCLUSION : That the position be noted and that this item be kept on the future work programme for updates on progress/developments accordingly.

9. GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

This item had been requested for discussion at the last meeting.

A note from the Borough Solicitor on the functions of the Committee was circulated for Members information.

CONCLUSION That the Borough Solicitor be invited to attend the next meeting to discuss this issue further and that in the interim this Committee give further consideration to the need and functions of the General Purposes Committee to enable a full discussion at the next meeting.

10. RECOVERY PLAN

Again this was an item that was part of this Committee's future work programme in terms of being kept updated on the Recovery Plan.

This Committee had undertaken to monitor and scrutinise the Recovery Plan but was aware that it did not want to duplicate things already being carried out by the Monitoring Board.

As part of the monitoring role it was suggested that this Committee look at the projects and objectives but that this was dependent upon having an up-to-date Recovery Annex.

In response to a question and comments made about the time period for the duration and need for the Recovery Board it was noted that this would probably be a long process. However as long as the Council kept delivering then there would be the need for less frequent Monitoring Board meetings.

The Council had to demonstrate its ability to deliver and it was noted that at the moment the Annex of the Recovery Plan had still to be accepted.

CONCLUSION That the position be noted and that this Overview & Scrutiny continue to be updated and to scrutinise, as necessary, the appropriate parts of the Recovery Plan.

11. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair referred to the issues comprising the future work programme of this Committee as agreed at the last meeting. With regard to Unitary Status and Regional Governance it was noted that this would be kept on the agenda for an update in the New Year. It was noted that the Chair of the Regional Assembly had visited Northampton and had been fully briefed on the major issues surrounding this Council and had subsequently asked Councillor Larratt to make a presentation to the next Regional Assembly meeting thus raising the profile of this Council accordingly.

CONCLUSI (1) That the discussion on the role of co-optees be taken to

- ON:** the December meeting.
- (2) That the role and remit of the General Purposes Committee and how it interacts and monitors be discussed at the next meeting and that the Borough Solicitor be invited to attend for this item accordingly.
 - (3) That a discussion on the Employee Attitude Survey (copies of which had been sent to members) be put on the Agenda for the next meeting and that again the appropriate Officers be invited to attend as well as representatives from the Union side to speak to this issue.
 - (4) That performance policy be kept on the Agenda for discussion at a future meeting.
 - (5) That the other remaining items as listed at the last meeting be left on the future work programme.
 - (6) That a budget process update and an update on the Corporate Plan be placed on the Agenda for discussion at the next meeting.

The meeting concluded at 8.10 pm.

12. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

The Chair moved that the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting on the grounds that there was likely to be disclosure to them of such categories of exempt information as defined by Section 100(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 as listed against such items of business by reference to the appropriate paragraph of Schedule 12A to such Act.

The Motion was Carried.

<TRAILER_SECTION>

The meeting concluded at Time Not Specified