

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL 3 - KEEP NORTHAMPTON TIDY

Wednesday, 26 November 2014

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillor Tony Ansell (Chair); Councillor Sivaramen Subbarayan (Deputy Chair); Councillors Penny Flavell, Mick Ford, Phil Larratt and Dennis Meredith

CO-OPTED MEMBER: Vanessa Kelly Northamptonshire Waste Partnership

Witnesses Jonathan Price, Highways Agency
Debbie Ferguson, Northampton Borough Council

Officers Steve Elsey, Head of Communities and Environment
Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer

Member of the Public Mr Appleyard

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Winston Strachan.

2. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2014 were signed by the Chair as an accurate record.

5. WITNESS EVIDENCE

(A) CHAIR, NORTHAMPTON BID

It was agreed that the Northampton BID would be contacted to see whether a representative could attend the next meeting of the Scrutiny Panel or provide a written response to the core questions of the Scrutiny Panel.

(B) ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

A representative of the Environment Agency was unable to attend the meeting and provide a response to the core questions of the Scrutiny Panel. The following information was provided:

The Environment Agency currently only deals with large scale fly-tipping involving organised crime. It has very few occurrences of this in the immediate Northampton area. It would obviously promote partnership working to deal efficiently with any such incidents.

The Scrutiny Panel noted the information provided by the Environment Agency.

(C) ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE, NCC - HIGHWAYS AUTHORITY

Andrew Leighton, Community Liaison Office, Highways, Transport and Infrastructure, Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) provided a written response to the core questions of the Scrutiny Panel. The Scrutiny Panel noted the salient points.

A discussion was held regarding the cleanliness and whether there was a de-cluttering programme for signage. It was agreed that the Cabinet Member for Transport, Highways and Environment, Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) and the Assistant Director for Highways, Transport and Infrastructure, NCC, be asked to attend the next meeting of the Scrutiny Panel.

AGREED:

- (1) That the information provided informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny review.
- (2) That the Chair invites the Cabinet Member for Transport, Highways and Environment, Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) and the Assistant Director for Highways, Transport and Infrastructure, NCC, to the next meeting.

(D) HIGHWAYS AGENCY

Jonathan Price, Highways Agency, gave an overview of the role of the Highways Agency which is managing and monitoring strategic networks – motorways and trunk roads. In Northamptonshire these are the M1, A5, A45, A43 and A14. The strategic roads within Northampton consist of the A45 and the M1.

Mr Price added:

- The Highways Agency has close working relationships with the County Council and District Councils in Northamptonshire

- Mr Price acknowledged that litter is a problem on motorways and trunk roads and is keen to see improvements, in particular in gateway locations such as Junction 15 of the M1
- It is currently the responsibility of the Highways Agency to clear litter from motorways and that of Local Authorities to clear trunk roads of litter

The Scrutiny Panel asked questions, made comment and heard:

- Mr Price acknowledged the general problem with littering on the strategic road network, and particularly in laybys
- The Highways Agency is currently preparing to become a Government owned company (ALMO) with a longer funding horizon of six years. It is expected that the new organisation will have more autonomy and more available funds. It is hoped that after April 2015 the organisation will be in a position to consider allocating more funds to problems such as littering on the trunk road network.
- It was highlighted that there is a duty on Agencies to co-operate with stakeholders on this issue.
- The Scrutiny Panel commented that fly posting is a form of littering and can sometimes be perceived as dangerous to drivers by distracting them
- Littering on the gateways into the town is a problem
- In response to a query whether the Highways Agency reports problems such as littering on roads that they are not responsible for, Mr Price confirmed that this takes place
- The Highways Agency and its contractors carry out regular route inspections. It was acknowledged that littering is a problem but it is difficult to enforce against.
- The Scrutiny Panel commented on the need for joined up working, such as during motorway closures, it would be useful for litter picking to take place. It was acknowledged that this is not always convenient as road works usually take place during night-time hours
- In response to concerns regarding the grass cutting schedule, Mr Price advised that grass cutting is carried out in the interests of safety/visibility rather than for amenity. Post April 2015, the grass cutting schedule may be able to be reviewed in this respect.
- In answer to a query about de-cluttering of signage; Mr Price confirmed that the Highways Agency does not encourage more signs in situ that are necessary
- Mr Price confirmed that the Highways Agency does want to do more about littering. One contribution is running anti-litter messages on variable message signs when not required to issue any advance warning.
- The Highways Agency has a dedicated telephone line that people can use for reporting issues such as littering. Regular checks of the strategic road network take place too.
- In answer to a query regarding the use of CCTV cameras and littering on motorway; it was confirmed that this is impractical due to the speed of traffic.
- It was suggested that littering campaigns at service stations would be useful.
- The Scrutiny Panel highlighted the need for a "Welcome to Northampton" sign on the entrance to Northampton on the A45 and another at Billing at J15. It was

acknowledged that a request had been submitted to the Highways Agency for the erection of the signs but the installation costs were high.

- The Scrutiny Panel suggested that the gateways into the town needed improving, for example grass cutting.
- The Scrutiny Panel commented that extra finance made available for gateways and signage, such as “Welcome to Northampton” would be welcomed.
- The Scrutiny Panel would highlight the need for a “Welcome to Northampton” in its final report

The Chair thanked Jonathan Price for providing a comprehensive response to the core questions.

AGREED: That the information provided informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny review.

6. BRIEFING NOTE: STREET DRINKERS

Debbie Ferguson, Community Safety Manager, provided a briefing note regarding the issue of Street Drinkers. Debbie Ferguson highlighted the salient points contained within the briefing note.

The Scrutiny Panel made comment, asked questions and heard:

- In response to a query regarding begging; Debbie Ferguson confirmed that if an individual does not ask for money and just sits there they are not necessarily breaking the law. Key wording in the relevant Police Act regarding begging is “aggressive begging”
- In Northampton, beggars are issued with a warning letter and “yellow card”, and informed if they are found to be begging again they will be issued with a red card and will be prosecuted. This approach has proved effective and due to this initiative some beggars have now left the town
- Debbie Ferguson confirmed that new legislation regarding Anti-Social Behaviour now includes the option to add positive sanctions to ‘Orders’, notices and injunctions, such as requiring an individual to attend a Drug and Alcohol Programme
- It was acknowledged that a number of beggars have serious alcohol problems; mental health issues and/or are homeless. Community Safety is trying to engage more with prolific Street Drinkers in order to address their offending behaviour and also provide support in addressing their issues. Debbie Ferguson gave an example of five Street Drinkers who are currently engaged in this process, three are doing well and one has taken part in a de-tox programme. Positive actions are being seen but it is not a quick process.
- The Chair referred the Scrutiny Panel to articles in the local press regarding individual Street Drinkers
- The Scrutiny Panel commented that Street Drinkers do not make the town look attractive, and create littering such as empty bottles and cans. There is a need for this issue to be highlighted in the final report of the Scrutiny Panel. The Scrutiny

Panel commented on the need to look at how the multi-agency approach to Street Drinkers is working. There is a need to look at the town as a whole. As part of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee role, in meeting their responsibilities under the Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny) Regulations 2009, a bi annual report from the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) is provided.

- In response to a query regarding the use of CCTV cameras and Street Drinkers, Debbie Ferguson confirmed that a CCTV camera is in situ close to where Street Drinkers congregate. A request can be put in that more focussed recording takes place. However, Debbie did reiterate the need to report any incidents to the police to ensure the issues are recorded, as that will enable the police to gain a clear picture of the problem and hot spot locations.
- The Scrutiny Panel discussed Community Safety Board noting that as part of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee role, in meeting their responsibilities under the Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny) Regulations 2009, a bi annual report from the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) is provided. A copy of the reports discussed at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee this year would be forwarded to the Scrutiny Panel for information.

AGREED: That the information provided informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny review

The meeting concluded at 7:38 pm