



Overview & Scrutiny

annual report

2005 - 2006



NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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Foreword by the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Overview and Scrutiny has seen many changes over the last year including the reduction of the number of committees from seven to one. The new committee came into action in October 2005. Since then the committee has established itself well and set up Task and Finish Groups to pursue in-depth review work of interest to the Council and public of Northampton.

A number of important reports have been published and they are summarised in this Annual Report. I have no doubt that some of the recommendations have had significant influence on

Council policy, in terms of holding the Cabinet to account and contributing to both policy development and the well-being of the town.

I am pleased that this Annual Report details the progress made by Overview and Scrutiny since October 2005 and work to develop its role even further. Over the next year further progress will be made. The Council has put a lot of energy in to improving the way it makes its decisions and the new Scrutiny processes are no exception.

I am confident we have everything in place for successful Scrutiny and that in future years further improvements and developments of the Scrutiny role will be seen.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B Glynane'.

Cllr Brendan Glynane
Chair, Overview and Scrutiny
Committee

Introduction

In accordance with the Local Government Act 2000, councillors are either Cabinet (Executive) councillors or non-Executive councillors. The non-executive councillors were envisaged to take on the role of overview and scrutiny councillors.

The original Government guidance on scrutiny envisaged four key areas of work for these councillors:

- Policy development and review
- Best Value
- External scrutiny including health scrutiny
- Holding the Executive to account

The Centre for Public Scrutiny was established to support the development of Overview and Scrutiny nationally. In their 2004 Good Scrutiny Guide they developed the following roles for effective public scrutineers:

- Provide critical friend challenge to executives and external authorities
- Reflect the voice and concerns of the public
- Take the lead and own the scrutiny process on behalf of the public
- Make an impact on the delivery of public services

These roles are described in detail in the Centre for Public Scrutiny Good Scrutiny Guide.

The Council has undertaken a critical review of its Overview and scrutiny function. Section 1 of this report describes the Improvements that have been made as a result of the review over the last Municipal Year.

Overview and Scrutiny has gathered momentum during this period and further developments are planned for the next year. These are detailed in Section 2.



The Overview and Scrutiny Process

Northampton's Scrutiny Structure

Following the Council's Political Structures Review in 2005, the Cabinet was reduced to a Leader with five Portfolio Holders. The seven Overview and Scrutiny Committees were replaced by one Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The new structures came into operation in September 2005.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee comprises fourteen Councillors representing each Political Group. The Committee sets up time limited Task and Finish Groups to carry out strategic and operational reviews.

All non-Executive Councillors are given the opportunity to be involved in the reviews by putting themselves forward to join the Task and Finish Groups throughout the year to review issues of interest and importance and inform critical policy development.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its Task and Finish Groups have no decision-making powers but make recommendations for consideration by Cabinet or Full Council. Their work means that they:-

- Contribute to policy development and help develop major plans and strategies for Northampton
- Hold the Cabinet to account for its decisions
- Examine matters of wider public interest
- Conduct reviews of public bodies that are external to the Council
- Review services of the Council
- Ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the Council
- Carry out joint work with partners during the same review process

Determining the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

In previous years there has been no Structured Annual Work Programme for Overview and Scrutiny. In trying to plan ahead, and deliver timely reviews, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee identified key topics in October 2005 for a Work Programme until the end of March 2006, that would either support the speedy recovery of the Council, enhance political efficiency of the Council or address Improvement & Performance Agenda Priorities.

In determining the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2006/2007 many issues were

considered. The resulting Work Programme contains issues critical to the Council's recovery, topics suggested for review by the Improvement Board, matters referred from Full Council and topics put forward by Overview and Scrutiny Councillors learning from 2005/6.

Previously there had been no structured monitoring process. The Committee has implemented a Monitoring Work Programme to ensure that the impact of the reviews are monitored

The Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2006/2007 has been widely circulated and is published

on the Council's and the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) websites

The review areas that have been agreed for 2006/2007 are:-

- Tree Policy
- Allotments (Water Charges)
- Housing Repairs
- Leisure Services
- Street Scene
- Homelessness (with an emphasis on rough sleepers)
- Community Safety (evaluation of dispersal orders)

Involving the Public

Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton involves the public as far as possible in its in-depth reviews that are undertaken by its Task and Finish Groups. The public can be involved by becoming a co-opted member to one of the Task and Finish Groups for the life of that review. Individuals with a particular knowledge of the subject being reviewed can be invited to give evidence at a Task and Finish Group meeting. This enables Councillors to make well-informed recommendations but also gives individuals and organisations from outside the Council a way of having their voice heard and influencing the delivery of Council services.

Two future Task and Finish Groups envisage having co-

opted members, who are experts in the topic being reviewed.

During the last year, Task and Finish Groups have involved the public by a variety of methods such as: -

- Hosting Focus Group sessions to find out the public's perception of how well Northampton Borough Council consults.
- Issuing consultation questionnaires to the Focus Group attendees, individuals who requested a copy and a wide distribution list.
- Interviewing expert witnesses.
- Youth Forum meeting
- Visits to users of services

Another method that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee uses to involve the public is by the use of an information sheet that is attached to the E-Bulletin newsletter. This section of the E-bulletin newsletter informs the public how it can find out about the work of Overview and Scrutiny and become involved by: -

- Attending a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Writing to the Task and Finish Groups
- Expressing an interest to become a co-opted member
- Becoming a witness
- Suggesting issues that they would like the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review

Use of the Web

It is proposed to develop a dedicated Overview and Scrutiny section on the Council's website which will include: -

- The role of Overview and Scrutiny and the scrutiny structure at Northampton
- Overview and Scrutiny meeting dates and times
- Link to Overview and Scrutiny Committee agendas and minutes
- Overview and Scrutiny Protocols and Guidance Information
- Co-Optee Guidance Handbook
- Copies of Overview and Scrutiny completed reviews
- E-Bulletin Overview and Scrutiny Newsletter
- Details of training and development sessions for key members of staff who may be called as witnesses by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- Contact details for Overview and Scrutiny

E-Bulletin Newsletter

An Overview and Scrutiny E-Bulletin newsletter has been produced and will be published three times per year. The first edition was published in Spring 2006 and the Summer edition is due to be published in August 2006. The E-Bulletin newsletter is designed to keep employees and the public up to date with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Task and Finish Groups news, training events, additions to the website, forthcoming meetings and new developments.

Training and Development

During 2005/6 an external expert was commissioned to provide overview and scrutiny development and coaching to Councillors. A programme of coaching sessions was devised which included:-

- Scoping reviews
- designing a work programme
- Conducting reviews
- Interviewing witnesses
- Developing and writing the review report
- Planning visits to other Councils
- Developing Protocols

All Task and Finish Groups were given support for the duration of their work.

Training and development Sessions have commenced for members of staff who may be called as witnesses by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. A half-day seminar for the Senior Corporate Management Team took place recently and whole day seminars for Managers and Team Leaders are scheduled. As this training is not commonly executed in councils, this could be viewed as

good practice. Details will be published on the Overview and Scrutiny page of Council's Intranet.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair and the Scrutiny Officer now attend the East Midlands Regional Local Government Association (EMRLGA) Scrutiny Network meetings which bring together Scrutiny Chairs and Scrutiny Officers from the East Midlands to discuss issues of mutual benefit.

Scrutiny Support

Overview and Scrutiny is supported by the Corporate Director for Citizens, Governance and Finance. Each Task and Finish review has one Corporate Manager and senior employee dedicated to it for the life of the review.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a Scrutiny Officer who carries out research, assists in compiling the Task and Finish Groups' final and update reports, produces the E-Bulletin newsletter, drafts the Annual Report, assists in the production of the Annual Work Programme, produces the agendas and minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its Task and Finish Groups and sets up relevant meetings, such as Task and Finish Groups, meetings with the Portfolio Holders and meetings of the Chair and Deputy Chairs. The Scrutiny Officer will produce the proposed Overview and Scrutiny web page,

ensuring it is kept up to date. The Scrutiny Support Officer attends professional development events.

The contact details for Overview and Scrutiny can be found at the end of this report.



Improvements and Long Term Objectives

Changes In 2005/06

During 2005/2006 important changes were made to the Overview and Scrutiny process. The Overview and Scrutiny Committees were reduced from seven to one. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee sets up time limited Task and Finish Groups to carry out its reviews. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee comprises fourteen Councillors drawn from each Political Group. All Task and Finish Groups must consist of at least one member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee but all non-Executive Councillors are encouraged to be involved in the Task and Finish Group reviews by putting themselves forward for inclusion.

Improvements

Many improvements have occurred during the past year.

- The development of the Annual Work Programme has been a major development a formally published and widely distributed document. The Work Programme contained issues critical to the Council's recovery, topics suggested for review by the Improvement Board, and matters referred from Full Council.
- Good practice Overview and Scrutiny Protocols and guidance notes have been produced and published to ensure the effective functioning and continuity of Scrutiny
- Joint working with Northamptonshire County Council.

Long-term Objectives

The aim of Scrutiny at Northampton is to develop an effective Overview and Scrutiny function that assists the Cabinet to improve the Council's services. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to: -

- Introduce a monitoring system which has been designed to log progress and a corporate template to monitor and log progress of the implementation of the recommendations that arose in the Task and Finish Groups' review reports to Cabinet.
- Continue to develop training for members of staff who may be called as witnesses by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The training will also ensure that key employees understand the Scrutiny process.
- Actively involve the public in the work of Scrutiny. To ensure this happens the Committee intends to involve residents in the work of the Task and Finish Groups.
- Allocate a lead Overview and Scrutiny Councillor to each Portfolio Holder to ensure Overview and Scrutiny connects directly with the Portfolio Holders' areas of responsibility. Regular meetings between the lead Overview and Scrutiny Councillors and the Portfolio Holders have been scheduled in order that working information can be shared.
- Introduce regular progress meetings with the Chair and two Deputy Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny with the three Corporate Directors.
- Develop the Annual Work Programme earlier during the next Municipal Year.
- Develop a dedicated Overview and Scrutiny page on the Council's website. All Overview and Scrutiny guidance notes, reports, newsletters and other Scrutiny information will be posted on this page.
- Involve external experts to inform Task and Finish Group Reviews.
- Work more closely with the media and public relations.
- Work closely with Northampton County Council for successful delivery of the Local Area Agreement (LAA).

The Overview and Scrutiny Programme 2005/2006

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met five times from October 2005 to April 2006. It looked at issues such as the Council's draft service review programme, the Council's CPA direction of travel report, the Council's draft Corporate Plan, the Annual Work Programme 2006/2007, the Annual Report 2005/2006 and received updates and the final reports from the Planning, Homelessness and Public Engagement and Communications Task and Finish Groups. The Committee also set up a Working Group to produce good practice Overview and Scrutiny protocols and guidance notes.

Call-In of Cabinet Decisions

The check and balance arm of Scrutiny had its first test of the new Scrutiny arrangements when the Sixfields Area Action Plan decision of Cabinet of 5 December 2005 was called in on the grounds that it would put the Council at significant risk.

Meetings were held to scope the call-in. The Call-In Hearing took place on 11 January 2006. Witnesses from Northampton Football Club, West Northamptonshire Development Corporation and members of staff from Northampton Borough Council were called to give oral evidence and be questioned. Written evidence and background documents were also considered by the Call In Hearing. The meeting lasted six hours. Following the Call In, the Chair's report was submitted to Cabinet, which accepted the findings in full and in addition added its own recommendations for the future conduct of Cabinet.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Cllr. Glynane (Chair)



Cllr. Roy (Deputy Chair)



Cllr. Malpas (Deputy Chair)



Cllr. Allen



Cllr. Church



Cllr. Eldred



Cllr. Hill



Cllr. B Hoare



Cllr. M Hoare



Cllr. Lane



Cllr. Mason



Cllr. Pritchard



Cllr. Simpson



Cllr. Tavener

Task and Finish Groups

Planning Task and Finish Group

Task and Finish Group membership



Cllr. Lane (Chair)

Cllr. Church

Work Undertaken

Following a referral from Full Council, the Task and Finish Group carried out a short focussed Overview and Scrutiny Review on the effectiveness and

efficiency of Planning Committee meetings at Northampton Borough Council. It met five times during November 2005 and February 2006, observed Northampton Borough Council and Colchester City Council's Planning Committee meetings, 'cold called' other Local Authorities and carried out desktop research using the internet.

Outcome of the Review

The Task and Finish Group made a number of recommendations to Full Council which were aimed at

increasing public satisfaction with both the Planning Committee and the Council's website. Many of the key recommendations of the review have been implemented and have helped to build upon the success of the Planning Committee meetings at Northampton.

Recommendations included:-

- Staff to keep a general watch for anyone who looks unsure or bewildered at the Planning Committee and offer advice.

- The Chair announcing any items withdrawn at short notice at the start of the meeting.
- The Planning Committee agendas being bound in a professional manner with the meeting dates advertised on the inside of the front cover. The aim being to minimise the changes needed from one agenda printing to the next.
- The Protocol for the meeting being printed on the inside front page of the agenda outlining who can speak, for how long and how business is conducted.
- Those registered to speak being informed verbally of the Protocol prior to the meeting so that they are

aware of what to expect. The Protocol is now published on the website.

- The Council's website indexing planning applications in alphabetical order, by street name and by postcode so that finding an application is easier.
- Northampton Borough Council's website being updated so that public speaking is no longer reported as a six month trial.
- Letter that is issued to consultees includes information on planning applications being available on Northampton Borough Council's website.
- The change of telephone contact numbers on the Council's website so that

the numbers are for departments rather than individuals to ensure a quick response and good customer service.

Most of the recommendations have been implemented with a small minority outstanding. The Corporate Manager (Planning) is working steadily with both the Chair of the Planning Committee and the Portfolio Holder regarding the actioning of these remaining recommendations and progress is ongoing.



Homelessness Task and Finish Group

Task and Finish Group Membership

Work Undertaken

Having regard to the Council's Recover Programme and following a referral from Full Council the Overview and Scrutiny Committee decided to review the homeless service both in Northampton and the county as a whole. This Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group was the first one to be conducted jointly with Northamptonshire County Council and is an excellent example of working in partnership with our neighbours. County Councillors Mark Bullock

and Maureen Hill were invited to join the Task and Finish Group. The Task and Finish Group was charged with reviewing homelessness as a whole system, including the interactions between and the processes on both councils to improve the quality of life and advice for people vulnerable to being homeless and to reduce all levels of homelessness.

The Task and Finish Group met seven times during November 2005 and March 2006 and heard evidence from a wide range of

representatives, including the Office of Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). It also observed operations at the Housing and Money Advice Centre.

Outcome of the Review

Significant progress has been made in terms of homelessness services since the Task and Finish Group was set up and delivered its recommendations.

The Task and Finish Group made a number of recommendations



Cllr. Mason (Chair)



Cllr. Allen



County Cllr. Bullock



Cllr. Pritchard

about homelessness prevention, partnership unity, internal processes, vulnerable people, rough sleepers and temporary accommodation.

The Homelessness review has been well received by the Cabinet and external scrutiny peers. For example, the report has been commended by another Local Authority, whose Scrutiny Commission is due to embark upon a review of homelessness in its borough. The Local Authority's Lead Scrutiny Councillors and Scrutiny Support Officer are to meet Homelessness Task and Finish Group, and relevant Northampton Borough Council employees to

look at areas of good practice that will inform their review.

Since this Review was undertaken, there have been significant improvements in the service. For example:-

- A Rent Deposit Scheme and Housing Options Toolkit has been devised and implemented
- A robust partnership between Northampton Borough Council and Northamptonshire County Council has been introduced
- The Homeless Forum to be relaunched in May 2006
- A project to introduce a Corporate Debt Policy will

be distributed to stakeholders in July 2006

- The supplier to introduce a new housing IT system was agreed
- A draft Temporary Accommodation Strategy has been developed
- Sign-off procedures for evictions and temporary accommodation were introduced in May 2006
- The Rough Sleepers Group has been relaunched and will develop a Rough Sleeping Strategy and responsive service.



Public Engagement and Communications Task and Finish Group

Task and Finish Group Membership



Cllr. Malpas (Chair)

Cllr. Eldred

Cllr. Hill

Cllr. Roy

Cllr. Simpson

Work Undertaken

Following a referral from Northampton Borough Council's Improvement Board, the Overview and Scrutiny

Committee was asked to review the way the Council consults with and engages its citizens. "Communications and public engagement" is a key priority in Northampton Borough Council's Recovery Plan. As the subject is vast, this Task and Finish Group concentrated on two focussed areas by examining:

- 1 the level of residents who feel that the Council consults and involves them and
- 2 The increase in the level of residents who are satisfied/very satisfied with the Council.

The Task and Finish Group met eleven times and gathered its evidence by a variety of methods including: -

- Interviews with internal witnesses
- Focus group sessions with local citizens
- Consultation Questionnaires
- Desktop research, looking at models of best practice
- Statistical information and data
- Visit to a Local Authority of best practice

Outcome of the Review

The Task and Finish Group made a number of recommendations including management and resources, information and co-ordination, systems and protocols, engagement with diverse communities and future

work and review. The report and its recommendations were received by the Cabinet at its meeting in July 2006. It is scheduled in the Overview and Scrutiny Monitoring Work Programme 2006/2007, to check the implementation of the recommendations in January 2007.



Working Group

Protocol Working Group



Cllr. Roy (Chair)



Cllr. B Hoare



Cllr. Tavener

Work Undertaken

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee felt that it was essential for good practice Overview and Scrutiny Protocols and guidance notes to be produced to ensure the effective

functioning and continuity of Scrutiny. A Working Group was set up which met to produce the good practice protocols and guidance notes.

Outcome

The following Protocols and guidance notes were produced: -

- Call-In Protocol
- Public Speaking at Overview and Scrutiny Committees Protocol
- Witness Protocol and Guidance Notes
- Co-Opted Guidance Booklet
- Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme Protocol

- Inclusion of non-Executive Councillors in the Scrutiny Process Protocol

The Overview and Scrutiny Protocols have been published and have been well received by Scrutiny peers, for example, a Local Authority requested a copy of the glossary contained in the Co-Opted Guidance handbook, so that it could be used as an example at an Overview and Scrutiny Toolkit workshop, which it was facilitating.

It is anticipated that the Overview and Scrutiny Protocols will be appended to the Council's constitution early in the autumn 2006.

Co-Opted Scrutiny Councillors to Northamptonshire County Council's (NCC) Scrutiny Committee

NCC's Health Scrutiny Partnership Committee



Councillor Brandon Eldred represented Northampton Borough Council on NCC's Health Scrutiny Partnership Committee during the last Municipal Year.

Councillor Eldred chaired a sub committee of the Health Scrutiny Partnership – Safety for Children aged 8 to 14. and led a project that informed young people (8 to 14 year olds) in the county about health and safety issues. Sports cards (top trump style) were printed with pictures of prominent sports personalities on the front, on the back, health and safety messages were detailed. It had been a multi agency project

The initiative had been allocated £20,000 of funding from NCC. 650,000 sports cards and 27,500 wall charts have been given out.

Talks were given to Youth Groups across the county. Young people are encouraged to collect and swap the cards, which are promoted by local libraries, leisure centres and the borough's Sports Development Team. Prizes are offered to individuals who collect all 25 cards such as signed sets of cards, signed shirts and free tickets donated from local sports clubs.

The project was launched in September 2005 at the Cedar Primary School and has been considered one of the most successful for NCC's Health Scrutiny Partnership Committee during last year. The initiative has been very well received by the local media and the Local Government Association, who referred to the project at one of its forums. The event will be further promoted at the county cricket ground on 23 September 2006.

Previous Overview and Scrutiny Reviews

The following Overview and Scrutiny Reviews have been carried out since October 2005.

Overview and Scrutiny Reviews 2005 - 2006

Planning Task and Finish Group- Planning Committee meetings at Northampton Borough Council

Homelessness Task and Finish Group -Homelessness as a whole system

Public Engagement & Communications Task and Finish Group – How the Council consults and Involves residents

Working Group

Protocol - Overview and Scrutiny Protocols and Guidance notes

Call-In of Cabinet Decision

Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Sixfields Area Action Plan



Contact Overview and Scrutiny Services at Northampton Borough Council

- Telephone 01604 837408
- Email: ttiff@Northampton.gov.uk
- Fax 01604 837395

- Post:-
Overview and Scrutiny
Northampton Borough Council
St Giles Square
Northampton
NN1 1DE

Feedback

Did you find this Annual Report useful and informative.

Yes

No

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If no, please state why

There are a number of ways in which you can find out about the work of Overview and Scrutiny. Details of all of the current reviews are given on the Council's website and in the Overview and Scrutiny E-bulletin newsletter, but if you want to know more you can attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, write to the Task and Finish Groups, become a witness or suggest issues that you would like the Committee to consider reviewing.

Would you like to become involved in the future work of Overview and Scrutiny

Yes

No

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If yes, please complete the details below.

Name

Organisation (if applicable)

Address.....

.....

Telephone number²⁴Email address

If English is not your first language and you need help in translating this document please contact Tracy Tiff on 01604 837408

Jesli angielski nie jest Twoim jezykiem ojczystym a potrzebujesz pomocy w przetlumaczeniu tego dokumentu, prosze skontaktuj sie z Tracy Tiff pod numerem 01604 837408

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Haddii afka Ingriisigu aanu ahayn luuqad-daada kowaad oo aad u baahan-tahay in lagaa caawiyo turjumidda warqaddan fadlan kala xidhidh Tracy Tiff tilifoonka 01604 837408

如果英語不是你的主要說用語言而需要幫助將這份文件翻譯，請致電 01604 837408 向 Tracy Tiff 提出要求。

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