



NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

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Angela Smith MP
Parliamentary under Secretary of State
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Our Ref: TW/CB/1532
Your Ref:
Please Contact: Councillor A W Woods
Ext/Direct Line 01604 837210
Date: 7th June, 2007
E-mail: cllr.awoods@northampton.gov.uk

Dear Minister,

Northampton Borough Council

I am writing to you as the newly elected Leader of Northampton Borough Council to update you on our progress. I have been fully apprised of our plans to improve the Council and satisfy the requirements set out in recent Audit Commission inspections.

As an administration, I want to assure you that we fully accept the Audit Commission's Progress Assessment, published in March 2007, and their Annual Audit and Inspection Letter currently available to us before publication as clear statements of our starting position as an administration. They provide the baseline against which we will be judged in the coming months.

We have identified three immediate priorities which will assist in the process of recovery:

- To release the energies of our staff to deliver a much better services to the public.
- To improve the way the Borough Council works with other key organisations in the town – such as the County Council, West Northants Development Corporation and the Police. Only by working better together, can we make significant improvements to Northampton.
- To satisfy the demands of our local community that Northampton Borough Council has effective leadership and is taking urgent steps to improve from its current position as one of the worst performing councils in the country.

In short, we are committed to **Stop Being Poor** at the earliest possible time.

Only once we have stabilised and improved the Council can we realistically deliver our manifesto commitments.

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You will be aware of the substance of the recommendations already. However, I want to assure you that the most pressing, the need to appoint a new Chief Executive, is already underway. An appointment should be made in early August 2007.

In addition, to deliver the essential service improvements we have already asked for options on the future approach to our Housing, Leisure and Recycling Services. Northampton Borough Council currently does almost everything in house and has not, in my view, adequately investigated alternative delivery models. These reviews will provide clear information on realistic options.

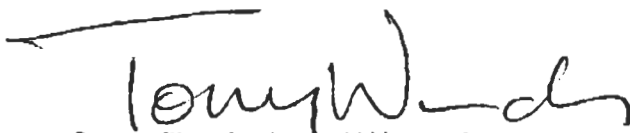
As you are also aware, John Edwards, our Interim Chief Executive, is helping us to move forward at speed and is acting as powerful stimulus to our improvement. John has already proved his worth in clarifying the governance arrangements for officers and is currently working with members to ensure that member and officers' decision-making is appropriately aligned. A new Finance Director, Isabell Proctor, is in post and has already recruited additional staff to strengthen the finance function. We will, shortly, be recruiting a Head of Planning.

I am confident that, when the Audit Commission return for their inspections this month and November this year, they will find an organisation that is, at long, long last, moving forwards.

I anticipate that as a poorly performing organisation there will be significant efficiency savings to be realised. Of course, these will take some time to be released. We do have capital assets – particularly in the form of land within the town centre – and we are using these to lever in investment into growth and regeneration. The timing of their release is critical to that successful growth and regeneration. Inevitably with such a large and immediate agenda, the budget is stretched this year and we're probably faced with an even tighter budget round for next year – at exactly the time we will need to invest in improvement. It would be remiss of me not to mention that I trust this urgent need to invest for sustained improvement and long term growth will have some recognition in your Department's support to the Council.

I look forward to meeting with you again soon after the Audit Commission's June inspection to update you on our progress.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Anthony W Woods
Leader of the Council

Copy: Pete Murphy



Angela Smith MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

cc J Edwards

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26 JUN 2007

Dear Mr Woods

Thank you for your letter dated 7th June about your progress on implementing the Audit Commission's recommendations set out in the Audit Commission's Progress Assessment which was published in February 2007.

It is important that there are significant improvements in Northampton Borough Council's performance and I am very grateful both for your letter and for the detailed comments within it. As you will appreciate strong, committed political leadership is vital for Northampton's recovery, and I too look forward to a time when Northampton is no longer in the 'poor' CPA category. I also await with interest the review of the Audit Commission, which I believe is now anticipated in early July rather than June.

I look forward to discussing this in due course and with yourself, John Edwards and Peter Murphy.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sincerely Angela Smith".

ANGELA SMITH

Copies: Peter Murphy, GO-EM, **Lead Official**
John Edwards, **Interim-Chief Executive**