

Council
Monday 27th September 2007

**Report of the Leader of the Council, Portfolio Holder for
Partnerships and Improvement**

A clear vision for Northampton

Appointment of a Chief Executive

David Kennedy's appointment was confirmed at the last Council meeting. David has since spent several days at the Authority meeting key officers and councillors. He is expecting to spend an average of about one day per week in Northampton until he takes up his position as Chief Executive. He expects to begin working full time for NBC in November 2007.

Corporate Plan

The Cabinet attended an 'away day' facilitated by David Kennedy and John Edwards on 14 September to begin the process of developing a new Corporate Plan. Significant further work is required in order for us to develop as meaningful, realistic and challenging set of priorities that reflect the needs of the community. The Cabinet focused on key outcomes and critical success factors for Northampton and on the cultural and structural changes that would be needed within NBC to deliver these.

Further work is planned and will be integrated with discussions on budget options in the next two months. A full report will be brought to Council at an appropriate time.

Joint Planning Committee

Northampton Borough Council continues to discuss the possibility of establishing a Joint Planning Committee with South Northamptonshire Council and Daventry District Council.

An open and efficient council

Audit Commission Progress Report – September 2007

NBC have now received a report from the Audit Commission giving the results of their 'progress check' carried out in July 2007. The report was considered at a Special Cabinet meeting on 25 September. A copy is attached as Appendix A.

The report confirms that the Borough Council has made 'adequate progress' since our last full inspection reported in March 2007. This is the first time since the original Comprehensive Performance Assessment Report in March 2004 that the Council has received a positive report on its progress.

The Audit Commission checked progress against the seven recommendations in their February 2007 report and against criteria discussed with the Council at a Government Monitoring Board meeting in March this year. Against key recommendations the Audit Commission's report makes a number of positive comments as follows:-

1. Political Leadership

- *“The Council is beginning to demonstrate stronger political leadership. This has been brought about mainly as a result of the May elections which saw one party gaining overall control of the Council.”*

2. Managerial Leadership

- *“The Council has taken steps to ensure that it has effective managerial leadership.”*
- *“Lines of accountability and responsibility are now much clearer to staff and managers. A new Management Board has been established to replace the previous rather large and unwieldy group. Minutes are taken and actions noted separately. These are reported and progress is tracked regularly. There is some evidence that this is having an impact and a more strategic focus is beginning to emerge.”*

3. Management and capacity in finance

- *“The Council has taken swift action to address weaknesses in the management and capacity of its finance function.”*
- *“The Council has put in place a robust strategy for addressing any under performance in the finance section.”*

4. Improvements in service delivery

- *“The Council has made some improvements to performance monitoring.”*
- *“Performance trends are largely positive.”*

However, the report also identifies areas for improvement and we are committed to putting these right. We can now begin to build on some positive foundations and work is underway already to address some of the weaker areas highlighted in the report.

The report notes:

- *“Recent work by managers suggests that this budget (the Council’s 2007-08 budget) may not be achievable.”*
- *“Financial planning is improving but is not yet robust.”*
- *“There is no single detailed, agreed, robust project plan in place for the delivery of budget reductions and efficiency savings with clear financial targets, timelines and accountabilities.”*
- *“The Council’s Corporate Plan is not sufficiently robust to deliver sustainable improvements in services.”*
- *“Service planning is not sufficiently robust to deliver sustainable improvements in services.”*
- *“Service improvement plans for the three weakest service areas of Housing, Planning and Benefits are generally of a better quality than their counterpart service plans. However, links between the two are not always explicit and it is not clear how the two are used in tandem to drive service improvement.”*

I accept these concerns and the Administration are working to ensure they are addressed.

It has been confirmed that the Audit Commission will return to carry out a full progress check on the Council commencing on 19 November 2007.

Tony Woods
18 September 2007