

**Council  
Monday 21 January 2007**

**Portfolio Holder Presentations**

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

### *A clear vision for Northampton*

#### **Employment of Directors**

The Chief Executive published his ideas for the high-level management structure for consultation to staff as part of his weekly brief on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2007. This proposed a structure including 4 Directors covering Finance and Support Services, Planning & Regeneration, Environment & Culture, and Housing. Below this the suggestion is to move to a Head of Service model. That consultation has now concluded and a report is coming to Cabinet on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2008. Initial feedback from staff has been favourable and the intention is to recruit to the Environment & Culture and the Housing Director posts forthwith.

### *An Open and Efficient Council*

#### **Inspections**

Our Progress Assessment inspection is scheduled for 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> February as previously reported. Our 'self-assessment' and supporting documentation was delivered to the Audit Commission on time. Our self-assessment, made against the Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) that the Audit Commission inspectors will use, is that the Council is 'improving well'.

We have now been informed of the dates and arrangements for an inspection of our Streetscene, Sustainability and Waste services. The inspection will be week commencing 10<sup>th</sup> March 2008 with a deadline for submission of our self-assessment documentation of 4<sup>th</sup> February.

Our Housing Services have a progress assessment planned in May. The Council has yet to be informed of the details of this inspection.  
Partnerships

#### **West Northamptonshire Development Corporation**

Cabinet confirmed the nomination of Cllrs Perkins and Woods for the WNDC Board in accordance with a request from the Secretary of State for a minimum of two nominations for one place on the WNDC Board. The selected nominee is expected to take up their place in March 2008.

Cllr Larratt will be standing down at that time. I am sure Council will want to thank Cllr Larratt for his efforts, as one of the Borough Council's nominees on the WNDC Board.

#### **Local Area Agreement**

Progress is being made towards agreeing a new Local Area Agreement, which is planned to come into effect in June 2008, and towards agreeing revised

governance arrangements – a Public Service Board – to better manage the LAA. This Public Service Board will replace the current LAA Management Board. The current LAA Management Board has considered early drafts of the Northamptonshire Sustainable Communities Strategy. Currently this document does not adequately recognise the position of Northampton as the ‘capital city of Northamptonshire’.

#### **Local Strategic Partnership**

The meeting of the Northampton LSP Board on the 7<sup>th</sup> January 2008 endorsed a final draft of the Northampton Sustainable Communities Strategy and, after some minor amendments, this Strategy will be submitted for Cabinet consideration.

#### **Corporate Plan**

The Council's Corporate Plan is currently out for consultation and a number of consultation meetings have taken place with the community, partners and stakeholders. The consultation will close on 31 January 2008 and will inform the final draft of the Council's priorities for 2008 - 2011. Further work is ongoing to develop service plans for next year which will provide the detail of the 2008/ 09 action plans to deliver the corporate priorities.

#### **Government Monitoring Board**

The Government Monitoring Board is meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2008.

Tony Woods  
January 2008

## **Report of the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration**

### *Improve our town centre*

#### **Grosvenor/Greyfriars development**

I am delighted that the council has signed a heads of terms agreement with Legal and General for the expansion and regeneration of the Grosvenor Centre to include the bus station and the land around it. The full and comprehensive terms of the agreement enable us to move on quickly to make a legal agreement with Legal and General early this year. This development represents the largest potential investment in our town centre ever, and demonstrates the confidence that does exist in the future of our town centre. Development will not happen quickly, and there are many issues yet to be resolved. We are now working with the County Council as the highways authority and WNDC as the planning authority together with Legal and General to deal with the many complex highway, infrastructure and planning issues involved with the scheme.

#### **Market Square**

A steering group to oversee the Market Square project has now been established and we expect a report to be ready for presentation by the end of March. The success of the skating rink at Christmas demonstrated the potential for the square to be used for leisure and entertainment. Market traders and representatives of traders are invited to attend the steering group meetings. A separate study is being done on the enhancement of frontages on the Market Square and part of Abington St with a view to ensuring that they are conserved and maintained in an appropriate way for our historic town centre.

#### **Establishing an Integrated Planning Service**

The recruitment process for the Head of Planning, Development Control Manager and Building Control Manager is progressing with the initial search phase completed.

The posts will now be advertised with a target start date of early in the new financial year. Work has already commenced to strengthen the working relationships within the service and between other Council services.

### *A safe, attractive town*

#### **The Needle**

Following the decision of the WNDC Northampton Area Planning Committee to grant planning permission for the needle and the associated sculpture at Black Lion Hill, I have written to the chair of WNDC requesting that their board withdraw the current proposal and consider a proper means of public consultation on a range of options for public art in that area.

### **Visit to Lincoln**

Cllr Woods, Cllr Hawkins Clive Thomas and myself visited Lincoln at the invitation of English Heritage to examine the 'Enquire by Design' process led by the Princes Foundation to assist them in drawing up a master plan for the city centre. Although the circumstances in Lincoln are different from Northampton we will learn from their experience in planning for Northampton Town Centre.

### ***Parks, leisure & cultural heritage***

#### **Beckett's Park**

Work will start soon on improvements to Beckett's Parks and Midsummer Meadow funded by Northamptonshire Enterprises Limited. The work will include an improved link from Victoria Promenade (opposite St. Johns car park) alongside the old railway embankment to the riverside. The old toilets will be demolished, trees thinned and the path resurfaced with new lighting. A new hard surface footpath will also be provided alongside the river through Midsummer Meadow. This work fits the council's objectives of improving links to the riverside.

Richard Church  
January 2008

## **Report of the Portfolio Holder for Performance**

### *High standards of service*

#### **Equal Pay Settlement**

Progress is being made to settle the authority's liability for Equal Pay with a "Signing Day" event on 09/01/08 relating to the 41 highest priority potential equal pay claims. Affected employees will be offered the chance to discuss the Council's offer of settlement and to receive advice from regional trade union representatives and/or ACAS.

If an employee decides to accept the settlement offer they will be required to sign an agreement which makes clear the terms and conditions of the offer. If employees chose not to settle with the authority they may chose to lodge an equal pay claim at an Employment Tribunal.

#### **Attendance Management.**

Attendance Management results for November are similar to the previous month at 1.23 days lost per full time equivalent (FTE). This puts us behind our target of 9.5 days for the whole year and we are on course for 11.1 by year end. This would be a marginal improvement on last year.

We have now introduced our replacement IT system for producing Management Reports on sickness and this is allowing us to make improvements in our controls. In addition a number of procedures have been updated for the New Year in relation to notification of absence and return to work interviews which will provide for greater consistency in approach. A pilot programme on Employee Well Being will be concluded later in January and its impact for wider use across the Council.

#### **Licensing**

The licensing department has contributed to more multi agency checks to ensure compliance of Liquor and Taxi / Vehicle Hire licence conditions Since October 4 operations have been undertaken which has resulted in 24 drivers reported for Unlawfully plying for hire, driving without insurance and failing to display their Private Hire Drivers Licence Badge.

Summons have been issued for 17 of these drivers to appear at Northampton Magistrates Court and similar procedures will be followed for the remaining 7. 'Flagging' leaves a customer un-recorded and as a being carried in a motor vehicle without insurance cover. We want passengers to be carried safely and protected by insurance in case of a road traffic accident. The three year review of the authority's policy in respect of the 2003 Licensing Act has been completed. The revised 'Statement of Licensing Policy' was considered by the Licensing Committee at its last meeting on 18th December and will be presented for approval by Full Council

Brian Hoare  
January 2008

## **Report of the Portfolio Holder for Environment**

### *High standards of service/value for money*

#### **Street Scene & Waste Management**

Preparations are underway for the forthcoming Audit Commission inspection in March. Similar to Property Maintenance, a virtual team has been established to review the Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE's) and gather evidence to support the self-assessment in March.

### *Consider the future of the planet in everything we do*

#### **Carbon Management Programme**

This programme continues to make timely progress. A schedule of proposed 'invest to save' projects has been identified and costed. Together, these projects are estimated to deliver annual savings of over 8% in carbon emissions in a full year. These proposals will be considered as part of the budget considerations for future years.

The finalised Strategic Implementation Plan will be submitted on programme at the beginning of March 2008, following the outcome of budget decisions by the Council.

### *Safe clean neighbourhoods for people to live in / Improve our town centre*

#### **Neighbourhood Wardens**

The wardens have been continuing their work with schools in educating young children about recycling, which has been hailed a great success by those schools involved. Since April 2007 56-fixed penalty notices have been issued and 3 people successfully prosecuted for littering; another 27 cases are now pending further action.

Furthermore, over 7000 Section 46 notices under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 have been issued to stop people putting out their waste at times other than collection days and to advise against side waste.

#### **Fly tipping**

Working in partnership with English Partnerships we have obtained video evidence of fly tipping in Ransome Road. The evidence has now been passed to the legal department who are seeking to pursue a prosecution. We continue to work with community groups to ensure that eyesore areas are cleared promptly and rubbish is removed.

We have also sought to increase the involvement of the Neighbourhood Wardens and Street Scene in these activities, who have carried out community clean ups in a number of areas including Delapre Street/Thirlestane Road, Crowthorpe Road/Collyweston/Ermine and Queens Park.

### **Ecton Lane Travellers Site**

All outstanding “snagging” items relating to the recent refurbishment contract have now been completed. There are other items of maintenance and repair, which are being pursued as part of the Capital Programme considerations for 2008/2009 and normal maintenance arrangements.

The tenders for the ongoing management of the site are currently being analysed, financial references clarified, and additional consultations requested by Cabinet are taking place. A report to Cabinet is proposed in February 2008 which will recommend options for the ongoing management of this site.

### **Health and Safety Enforcement**

Northampton Borough Council has successfully secured a prosecution against the owners of the Lumbertubs Pub for failing to install safety glass and failing to implement an improvement notice. The owners, who own a number of pubs, were fined £25,000 and ordered to pay £5,055 costs. The owners have now promised to reassess all their pubs to ensure appropriate safety glass is installed.

### **Smoke Free Legislation**

This continues to be monitored and advice given to businesses. The levels of compliance remain high.

Trini Crake  
January 2008

# Report of the Portfolio Holder for Housing

## *High standards of service*

### **Housing department performance**

Benefits processing times continue to improve with current performance for new claims an average of 28 days for the year against an annual target of 30 days. The percentage of new claims dealt with in under 50 days is in the top quartile nationally.

Void performance is causing concern as the number of days for a council dwelling remaining empty is increasing. As a result, a high emphasis has been put on identifying and resolving any blockages and in raising the importance of this indicator with staff. A number of workshops have been held with key groups of staff and a weekly meeting of lead officers is being held to identify issues and resolve them.

Following a major reconciliation exercise between the old and new IT systems, IHSL (Integrated Housing System Live) and IBS Open Housing, we are able to report on rent collection information on the new system. The information is showing good progress against our annual target.

### **Partnership Working**

Housing will be piloting a trainee scheme in 2008 aimed at increasing the representation within the workforce of ethnic minority employees. The scheme will be launched in partnership with PATH (Positive Action Training Highway) national who are a leading organisation in this field. All trainees will be given a two year traineeship including job release to study for the relevant housing professional qualification.

The homeless action planning day led by the Communities and Local Government (CLG) was very well attended by key stakeholders and a comprehensive action plan was produced to assist in delivering a more co-ordinated approach to helping homeless people and their families.

The first meeting of the Gypsy and Travellers steering group was held in December. This group consists of key officers in the council who have a responsibility for an aspect of service to this group. The purpose of the steering group is to ensure a joined up approach and therefore improvements to services in this area.

### **Key issues**

The Housing service has recently been successful in relation to funding bids to CLG:

- The department has received 3 year funding to assist with its homeless prevention services
- £69k has been awarded to develop and implement our choice based lettings scheme

A visioning day was held in December and presentations were made on 'place shaping' and on the new freedoms and flexibilities within the Housing Revenue account. This has assisted our collective understanding of the potential for Northampton regarding housing growth and asset management of our housing stock.

Work has commenced on developing our service improvement plan for 2008/9. This will be developed in partnership with key stakeholders and will be implemented by April 08.

Consultation with a wide range of tenant representatives has commenced to review our current engagement activities with a view to proposing enhancements to our current participation strategy.

Work continues on preparing for the introduction of Local Housing Allowance in April 08, which will replace Housing Benefits for certain groups of claimants. Briefing sessions are being arranged with landlords early in January to help ensure that this new procedure is understood and introduced with the minimum of disruption.

Sally Beardsworth  
January 2008

## **Report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance**

### *Sort out the Council's finances*

#### **Budget 09/10**

The draft budget for consultation was agreed by Cabinet on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2007, along with the draft consultation leaflet. Work is underway in developing the Capital programme for next year, with a report going to Cabinet on 20<sup>th</sup> February.

#### **Monthly Monitoring**

Revenue and Capital Monitoring reports are now a regular feature at Cabinet, and a new statutory report monitoring prudential indicators has now joined the suite.

#### **Use of Resources Assessment**

We have received a draft use of resources score and whilst it is still a 1 overall it shows significant improvement with a 2 for both value for money and financial standing. We have been told by our auditors that the other areas are on the 'cusp' of a 2. We are therefore confident that the next inspection will be a minimum of 2 if not more.

#### **Delapre Abbey**

The Options Appraisal funded by the Council is now well underway and important base work is being completed. The lead consultant intends to go out to the wider public for consultation in March.

#### **Sea Cadets**

Following the support expressed by this administration for the Sea Cadets' work with young people, we have confirmed that they will have a new 10 years lease from next summer at a very low rent. We have further made it clear to them that if they can attract funding for improvement works they would like to undertake, and that grant assistance is dependent upon them having a longer lease than 10 years, we would be prepared to consider a longer arrangement.

#### **Northampton Town Football Club**

Good progress has been made with the Football Club in dealing with their request for changes to their existing lease. This should help them to bring forward a hotel development that will provide resources to support the future of the Club. Specific proposals will be considered at the next Cabinet meeting.

Malcolm Mildren  
January 2008

## **Report of the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement & Safety**

*Safe, clean neighbourhoods for people to live in / Places for people to enjoy*

### **Community Safety**

Crime trends continue to fall, and are now in line with other similar areas for burglary and vehicle crime, but we continue to work closely with our partners to drive crime down significantly. The recent re-visit to the Safer, Stronger Northampton Partnership by the Home Office's Partnership Support team found much improvement since their initial report in early 2007, particularly the introduction of new systems of sharing intelligence on community safety, initiated by this Council. We will be placing greater emphasis in 2008 on tackling the root causes of crime and anti-social behaviour, with multi-agency groups developing plans around environmental issues, drug and alcohol abuse, vulnerable young people, persistent and other priority offenders, and community cohesion.

### **Museums**

The Council's museum service is attracting much positive attention, with the successful launch of the programme for the summer's 'Venezia!' festival attracting several major local sponsors as well as support from the Italian government. Visits to the museums are within the top quartile nationally. Our survey of schools suggests the costs of transport and additional paperwork now required for external visits is the main factor in a decrease in visits. The leisure service has been re-assessed for the Chartermark award, which is a thorough external endorsement of its standards of quality. Support from customers is strong, with Direct Debit sales outstripping last year's by a great margin.

### **Balloon Festival**

A cross-party group to generate ideas for the future of the Balloon Festival was agreed at Cabinet on 7<sup>th</sup> January. This and all other aspects of Northampton Borough Council's role in culture and leisure will be placed in the framework of a cultural strategy shortly to be published in draft.

### **Town Centre Operations**

In line with our drive to increase value for money and develop a car parking strategy which seeks to enhance the economic, social & cultural vitality of the town, a comprehensive review of the Borough's car parking service is to be undertaken (when). This will include a review of the balance between revenue, economic vitality and the environment. Pay-on-foot is now live in St. Michael's car park and will be in St. John's very soon. The Town Centre Partnership continues to develop, facilitated by this Council; as an example, the recently formed St. Giles Street Traders group within the partnership had a successful Victorian Christmas themed day in December.

## *Consult widely on key decisions affecting people's lives*

### **Community Engagement Strategy**

The Council's draft Community Engagement Strategy is currently out for consultation which will close on 25th January 2008. The strategy will set the principles on which the council will engage with communities, partners and stakeholders to ensure that we carry out our engagement activities in a co-ordinated, planned and effective way. We anticipate that following the end of the consultation period and any revisions to incorporate the outcomes of consultation that the strategy will be brought before Cabinet in February 2008.

## *Value for money / High standards of service*

### **Customer Service Performance**

Ongoing service improvements in Revenues & Benefits call handling has resulted in a sustained improved performance of 96.7% calls answered compared to May 07 when it was 48.5%. Customer Contact Centre performance continues to exceed targets with 97.9% calls answered with 94.1% of those calls answered within 15 seconds.

### **Restructure Update**

Recruitment for the Partnership & Support Services Manager and Service Improvement Team Leader is scheduled to take place in January. A successful move of the Revenue & Benefits Telephone Call Handling team from the Guildhall into the Customer Contact Centre has been achieved with no disruption to customers and the support of the staff.

### **One Stop Shop Pilot Project**

A 3-month pilot project commenced in December where customers are able to report information and speak to the Police confidentially whilst visiting the One Stop Shop. The feedback to date has been very positive from customers who have reported information that they would previously not have.

### **Financial review of Call Care**

A financial review of call care has been completed. Cabinet will receive an Medium Term Planning (MTP) option with proposed increase in charges for the alarm monitoring service. It is proposed that there are yearly price increases introduced from April 1<sup>st</sup> to achieve 80p per connection per week by 2010/11. A letter advising customers of the proposed increase in charges has been sent out on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2008.

### **Supporting Housing, Streetscene & Waste Management Inspections**

Key customer service staff are working closely with teams in Housing, Streetscene and Waste Management in preparation for forthcoming inspections.

**Complaints Management**

There continues to be ongoing improvement in our ability to respond to complaints earlier. Further work is in progress to capture learning and service improvements. Informal feedback from the Local Government Ombudsman indicates improved confidence in our systems and procedure with improvements in the number of days initial requests are responded to.

**Institute of Customer Service Professional Awards**

A further 25 staff have been identified to undertake the Professional Award. There are currently 6 staff that are awaiting assessment of their award.

**Value for Money Reviews**

Value for Money reviews are to be completed in the Print Services Unit and Post Room by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008.

Brendan Glynane  
January 2008