

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Your attendance is requested at a meeting to be held in the Guildhall on
Thursday, 6 April 2006 at **7:00 pm**.

M McLean
Chief Executive

AGENDA

1. APOLOGIES
2. MINUTES
3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES
4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)
5. TASK AND FINISH GROUP UPDATES
 - (a) Homelessness Councillor L Mason
 - (b) Public Engagement and Communications Councillor C Malpas
 - (c) Planning Councillor J Lane
6. FORMAT OF TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORTS
- 7(A) CPA REPORT M Abela
Corporate Director/
Councillor Glynane
- 7(B) DRAFT SERVICE REVIEW PROGRAMME Thomas Hall
Corporate Manager/
Councillor Glynane
8. PRIORITIES AND FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME 2006/2007
9. SCRUTINY PROTOCOL WORKING GROUP Councillor A Roy
10. THE CHAIR TO MOVE

That the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting on the grounds that there is likely to be disclosure to them of such categories of exempt information as defined by Section 100(l) of the Local Government Act 1972 as are listed against such item or items of business by reference to the appropriate paragraph of Schedule 12a to such Act.

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 6 APRIL 2006

REPORT OF THE HOMELESSNESS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

1. Purpose

To review homelessness in Northamptonshire as a whole system, including the interactions between and the pressures on both councils to improve the quality of life and advice for people vulnerable to becoming homeless and to reduce the overall level of homelessness.

2. Context

This is the first example of joint scrutiny working between the borough and the county. Homelessness is high on the national agenda and has been identified as a service pressure at both Northampton Borough Council and Northamptonshire County Council. Of particular concern has been:

- The high numbers of homeless applications
- Lack of alternative housing options
- Lack of a multi-agency approach
- Failure to address the needs of vulnerable groups
- The high cost of temporary accommodation.
- The previous poor relationship between the county and the borough

3. Evidence

During the six half day meetings the Committee heard evidence from:

Fran Rodgers, Corporate Manager, NBC, - Homeless Baseline information and case studies

Mohammed Sabeel, Homeless Link, – Homeless Forum and the role of the voluntary sector

Councillors Pritchard and Allen - visit to the Housing Advice Service at Fish Street

Lisa Barker, Operations Manager - Homelessness Directorate, ODPM - the national perspective

Nigel Stock, Northamptonshire County Council – Services for Young People-case studies.

Brian Binley, MP, - case studies particularly concerning joint custody awards.

Ann McGrail - Learning disability issues

Jon Olsen, Community Service manager, Northamptonshire Healthcare Trust.

4. Conclusions

It is clear that significant improvements have been made within the homeless service in the last few months since the Task & Finish group has met.

For example, homeless applications have been reduced by two-thirds since October 2005.

Both the number of applications and the number of admissions to temporary accommodation have reduced by 50% in the last 5 months.

Numbers in temporary accommodation are down from 198 at the end of September 2005 to 104 at the end of February 2006 and specifically from 53 in bed and breakfast to only 4 in the same period.

There is still much to do to ensure that prevention initiatives are embedded and that service level agreements and working arrangements are robust and effective.

Prevention is the key for the future and features prominently in the draft service improvement plan for homelessness.

5. Recommendations

The following series of recommendations are grouped in specific categories:

1. Homeless Prevention:

- Dedicate sufficient resources to homeless prevention
- Develop quality front-line services which meet the needs of all customers
- Establish a housing options toolkit including a long term rent deposit scheme
- Investigate options for and realistically cost a sanctuary scheme for people suffering domestic abuse
- Develop a spend to save strategy with a realistic budget allocation and robust criteria for expenditure

2. Partnership Working

- By Sept 2006 introduce robust protocols particularly with Northamptonshire County Council for:

- (a) Looked after children aged 16 and over, particularly children leaving care, and teenagers aged 16/17.
 - (b) Intentional homeless families
 - (c) Youth offenders
 - (d) Prison leavers
 - (e) Ex-army personnel
 - (f) Adults with Learning disabilities
 - (g) Adults with Mental Health issues
- Ensure voluntary sector support and 'buy-in' to the principles of homeless prevention through regular liaison and performance monitoring
 - Work with other social housing partners to develop a purpose built hostel for single homeless people (and their dogs!)
 - Engage Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in the homeless prevention agenda, particularly to provide specialist support to vulnerable groups
 - Northampton Borough Council/Northamptonshire County Council should lead on the development of the Homeless Forum and the homeless thematic partnership for all agencies in the county
 - Develop the regional homeless strategy in partnership with all Councils in the county and within the East Midlands region.
 - Work with other key partners including the Police and Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) to reduce homelessness.

3. Internal Processes & Procedures

- Ensure internal Council procedures are joined up and effective, for example, sign up to a Corporate Debt Policy
- Improve the accuracy of statistical recording through investment in IT.
- Sign off decisions on evictions.
- Temporary accommodation admissions - sign off procedures

4. Vulnerable People

- Develop a strategy for managing the housing needs of people with learning disabilities
- Ensure floating support services are targeted at the most vulnerable groups
- Consult with users to better understand their needs and meet their aspirations
- Provide tenancy support for young people to help sustain their tenancies
- Customers to be kept informed of the progress of their application and what to expect at each stage.

- Ensure a joined up approach with multi agency involvement. A lead agency to be appointed to take overall responsibility.
- Develop awareness training for all staff involved in homeless issues including joint training sessions for NBC and NCC staff.
- Better access to the service for minority groups.

5. Rough Sleeping

- Develop a multi-agency approach to dealing with rough sleeping with particular emphasis on:
 - (a) Work with mental health trusts
 - (b) Services for people leaving the armed forces
 - (c) The role of the DAT teams

6. Temporary Accommodation

- Provide high quality 'value for money' services through robust budget management and accessing available funding streams
- Develop a robust temporary accommodation strategy that provides quality accommodation at competitive prices
- Keep use of bed and breakfast accommodation to a minimum other than in an emergency.
- Make links with other relevant agencies e.g. local colleges regarding accommodation.

7. Financial implications

- NBC has committed £100,000 in 2006/7 for homeless prevention initiatives.
- Further funding of £90,000 has been made available by ODPM for specific projects such as work on Rough sleeping.
- It is anticipated that the majority of actions identified in this report will be contained within existing budgets unless otherwise specified.
- Agreement in principle to work towards a joint NCC/NBC solution for intentional homeless families.
- Agreement in principle to the recycling of savings from homeless initiatives back into homeless prevention.
- The Group recognises the disproportionate impact of cuts in funding in this area and supports the "invest to save" approach to homelessness.

8. Review timescale

- It is proposed that we review progress in 6 months

Agenda item 5(b)

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 6 APRIL 2006

BRIEFING NOTE

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS TASK AND FINISH GROUP - UPDATE

1 INTRODUCTION

Following the update given to the last Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Public Engagement and Communications Task and Finish Group has met a further three times with another two meetings scheduled.

At its meeting on 17 February the Group began to compile its report. After looking at the evidence and information gathered, against the scope of the Review, Councillors agreed that further work was required to complete the review such as: additional desktop research, information from best practice Councils, a visit to a best practice Council and a Focus Group to obtain the public's perception of how well Northampton Borough Council (NBC) consults with its citizens.

2 ANALYSIS OF DATA AND INFORMATION GATHERING

Further desktop research has been carried out on the City of Westminster's website in comparison to NBC's website. Information and data from Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council, Wiltshire County Council and Croydon Borough Council regarding their consultation methods, have been obtained and analysed.

Councillors visited the London Borough of Haringey (Beacon Council for Getting Closer to its Communities) on 21 March 2006. A presentation from the Head of Neighbourhood Management was given, followed by a question and answer session. The Group had a tour of the work of Neighbourhood Management and met with a Cabinet Councillor, the Beacon Co-Coordinator, the Communications Manager and community workers.

The Focus Group has been arranged over two days. The evening of Thursday 20 April from 6pm to 8pm and the afternoon of Friday 21 April 2006 from 2pm to 4pm. A poster has been placed on NBC's website and on various notice boards. Various individuals and organisations have been invited to attend, including those on Area Partnership and Forum distribution list, all Councillors and Parish Council representatives. Questionnaires have

been issued for individuals wishing to take part but unable to attend the Focus Group.

3 CONCLUSION

As the Group has agreed that there is further work to be carried out, before it can complete its findings and produce a report, it has extended its timescale for completion. It is envisaged that the review will be completed before the Annual Council meeting in May. My report will be presented to the first Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of the new Municipal Year on 14 June 2006.

Author: **Councillor Christopher Malpas**
Chair, Public Engagement and Communications
Task and Finish Group

Draft Service Review Programme

	Cross Cutting Review	Service Review	Light Touch Review
2006/07		Area Partnerships and Community Forums (proposed March 06)	
			Voids Management (Proposed April 06)
		Waste Collection and Recycling	Abandoned Vehicles
	Community Safety		
			Environmental Health
		Leisure	Homelessness
		Contracts Management/Procurement	
			IT Procurement
2007/08	Social Cohesion		
			Performance Management
		Leisure and Recreation Services	
			Property Maintenance
		Asset Management	
			Revenues and Benefits
	Customer Access (including out of hours services)		
		Regeneration and Neighbourhood Renewal	
2008/09	Community Engagement and Consultation		Human Resources Management
		Planning Services and Development Control	
		Councillor and Meeting Services	
			Print Services
		ICT Services	
		Financial Services	
			Property Strategy and Accommodation
			Risk Management
Cross Cutting	Finance, Governance, Citizens	Customer and Service Delivery	People, Performance, Regeneration

Agenda item 9

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 6 APRIL 2006

BRIEFING NOTE

PROTOCOL WORKING GROUP

CALL IN PROTOCOL

The Call In Protocol is still work in progress with the Protocol Working Group. A key element to be defined is the level of gate keeping that exists within the Protocol. The suggestions are: -

- The Monitoring Officer acts as a gatekeeper to ensure that call-in requests are legitimate.
- The Chair and two Deputy Chairs act as a gatekeeper to ensure that call-in requests are legitimate.
- The provision of a gatekeeper is not introduced

It would be helpful for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to have some initial debate on this to inform the Working Group's discussions.

Other amendments to the Protocol that have been agreed by the Working Group include: -

- Call In would either be heard at a specially convened meeting or at the next scheduled Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.
- *Decision taker* to be replaced with Leader/relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holder.

Author: Councillor Anjona Roy
Chair, Protocol Working Group

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
6 APRIL 2006**

DRAFT

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FORWARD
WORK PROGRAMME PROTOCOL**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will produce a Work Programme, which sets out the work of the Committee for the 12-month period.

At the last meeting of the Municipal year (April), the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should consider its Work Programme for the following year.

The Work Programme would comprise no more than three major issues, so as to allow for the inclusion of ad hoc and urgent items during the year.

It is important for Overview and Scrutiny to report its workings and recommendations for future work programmes to Full Council at least once a year.

A draft programme will then be presented to the first meeting in the new Municipal year for adoption. Once adopted, the Work Programme will be published.

Need to include:

How items get onto the Work Programme?

Who can put items forward?