

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 29 January 2018

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillor Jamie Lane (Chair), Councillor Graham Walker (Deputy Chair); Councillors Tony Ansell, Rufia Ashraf, Mohammed Aziz, Alan Bottwood, Vicky Culbard, Janice Duffy, Paul Joyce and Cathrine Russell

Councillor Anna King, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Engagement
Councillor Mike Hallam, Cabinet Member for Environment

Paul Hymers, Strategic Finance Business Partner
Paul Loveday, Senior Finance Business Partner
Phil Harris, Head of Housing and Wellbeing
Derrick Simpson, Town Centre Manager
Ruth Austen, Environmental Health and Licensing Manager
Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer

Councillor Phil Larratt - observing
Councillor Arthur McCutcheon – observing

Member of the Public Gary Shields - Observing

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Brian Sargeant and Councillor Christopher Malpas.

2. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2017 were signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

There were none.

5. REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORTING AND MONITORING WORKING GROUP - GENERAL FUND MTFP 2018/2019 - 2023 AND 2018/2019 DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS

The Chair introduced the report of the Overview and Scrutiny Reporting and Monitoring Working Group - General Fund MTFP 2018/2019 - 2023 and 2018/2019 Draft Budget Proposals, advising that the Working Group had considered the budget proposals in detail and had decided that the following required budget scrutiny:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased income – Car parking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in events programme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Services Contract – Net budget stream for the Environmental Services vehicles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges on temporary accommodation and homelessness budgets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRA stock loss and mitigation through a new build programme

Councillor Mike Hallam, Cabinet Member for Environment and Councillor Anna King, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Engagement together with Paul Hymers, Strategic Finance Business Partner, Paul Loveday, Senior Finance Business Partner, Phil Harris, Head of Housing and Wellbeing and Derrick Simpson, Town Centre Manager provided further details:

Paul Hymers set the scene for the draft General Fund, (GF) MTFP 2018/2019 to 2022/2023 and 2018/2019 Draft Budget Proposals from both the national position and then the local perspective. He highlighted the key elements contained within the report and emphasised that the reduction in Government funding and pressures on budgets, in particular the Environmental Services contract impacted upon the funding gap. It was confirmed that the Council had a draft balanced budget for 2018/2019 and 2019/20 but gaps beyond this are the best estimates at this stage but become increasingly uncertain into the future.

The Chair advised that the Committee was very pleased that a draft balance budget for 2018/2019 had been arrived at.

Increased income – Car parking

- Derrick Simpson apprised that parking in the multi storey carparks within the town are monitored and weekly figures provided. Over the last three years, the £2 charge would have very little change on Saturdays, as this is a busy period. Free, two hours parking, will remain Monday to Friday.
- Parking statistics in relation to service car parks are not available. However, 7 years ago, around 100,000 vehicles used the service car parks.
- On street parking on Sundays is currently free, however, as part of NCC’s draft budget proposals are included to introduce on street parking charges for Sundays.
- Blue badge holders and motorcycles will still be able to park for free

The Committee asked questions, made comment and heard:

- In response to a query regarding the effect the proposed increase could have on commuters; the Committee heard that the charges were proposed to increase from £7 to £8 per day.
- £2 parking charge would apply for all day Saturday

Reduction in events programme

Derrick Simpson advised that the proposed reduction in events budget was over a number of budget heads, for example it is proposed to charge for all commercial activities, reduction in the music festival by providing £10000 of funding rather than £15000, and not providing any support to the town festival, a reduction in the Christmas budget. The Council has enough artificial Christmas trees to last for the next 4-5 years.

The Committee asked questions, made comment and heard:

- The performance of bands in the park is oversubscribed, however, putting on bands in the park on Bank Holiday Mondays is being investigated
- In response to a query whether assistance could be provided to the Irish Festival, Derrick Simpson advised that the organisers could apply for small grant funding if they so wished.
- It was confirmed that there is an oversupply of trees for Christmas and Officers are working with other within the Christmas community

Environmental Services Contract – Net budget stream for the Environmental Services vehicles

The Chair advised that the specific query that the Working Group had posed had been around the costs to the Council of purchasing the vehicles for the environmental services contract and leasing them back to the Council over 10 years.

Councillor Hallam and Paul Loveday advised that the winning bidder will be in a good position to have access to the supply chain and the Council has better access to funding. By purchasing vehicles this way, the cost of the contract is reduced. The contractor will have expertise in purchasing the vehicles and the Council will be able to access better interest rates. The Council will lease the vehicles to the contractor. All vehicles have a replacement schedule included in the contract.

The Committee asked questions, made comment and heard:

- The contractor is contracted to do the job and is therefore responsible for all maintenance costs of the vehicles. Details such as emissions, maintenance and repairs will be included in the finer details of the contract.
- The vehicles have a 10 year life span. Over ten years the vehicles will depreciate. At the end of the contract, a reprovision process will commence and will include new vehicles.

Challenges on temporary accommodation and homelessness budgets

Phil Harris, Head of Housing and Wellbeing advised that over the last two years homeless applications to the Council has doubled, in the same period, households in temporary

accommodation has trebled and social housing has decreased which has led to an increase in those in temporary accommodation. The Housing Officer's caseloads has significantly increased which in turn had increased the number of outstanding decisions. For example, Officers had around 50 cases outstanding (the norm being 15); the backlog had increased and by September 2017 had peaked at 200 plus, with 150 families in temporary accommodation. The number of people living in bed and breakfast accommodation had trebled; with a number living outside the borough. An action plan was produced and 130 decisions were outsourced to a Residential Group that had helped to relieve the pressure. From September to December 2017, homeless applications had decreased from 205 to 66. Housing Officers caseloads reduced from 59 to 18 and the average wait time to see a Housing Officer reduced from 4 weeks to a few days. Further statistics were provided. This approach, through a series of Policy changes, had worked very well as it had reduced the backlog, reduced workloads etc. The Team is coping much better now but cost is a challenge. Funding from central Government is only a fraction of the actual cost to the Authority.

The Committee asked questions, made comment and heard:

- In response to a query regarding potential evictions, Phil Harris advised that people are urged to make contact with Housing Officers as soon as possible. However a lot of people do present on the day of eviction. An additional officer has been engaged to deal with those individuals that turn up as homeless. Face to face discussions are held which has proved useful in preventing homelessness.
- Demand has not reduced by has become more manageable.
- Work is ongoing with the Private Sector Letting Agency regarding reducing the cost of temporary accommodation.
- The Committee conveyed its thanks and congratulations to the Housing Team for all its work on this

HRA stock loss and mitigation through a new build programme

Phil Harris apprised that a report to Cabinet is scheduled that will set out ways of maximising supply of new homes. NPH had submitted a proposal for up to 1000 homes to be built over the next ten years. Capita had been instructed by the Council to consider the proposals and put forward recommendations. Conclusions had been that the proposal of NPH had been sub optimum and their conclusions had been shared with NPH. Revised proposals had been submitted that addressed some of the concerns regarding sub optimum. The report to Cabinet will identify these. HRA will be made the most of regarding the provision of new homes. It is estimated that 940 Council homes are likely to be sold; from Right to Buy receipts, the Council could replace 500 of these. This will be a major step forward but it will only slow the rate that Council houses are being sold off. The Committee noted the details provided by Phil Harris and asked no further questions.

The Cabinet Members and officers were thanked for attending the meeting and providing comprehensive details to the Committee enabling it to undertake budget Scrutiny on the five issues referred from the Reporting and Monitoring Working Group. The Committee was content with the responses and information provided regarding the five issues.

6. MONITORING OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS CONTAINED WITHIN OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORTS

(A) MUSEUM TRUST

Councillor Anna King, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Engagement, presented the briefing note on the update on the Museum Trust.

In noting the report, the Chair asked that an update is provided in one year to the Committee; January/February 2019.

(B) ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Ruth Austen, Environmental Health and Licensing Manager, presented the monitoring action to the Committee, highlighting key points.

The Committee asked questions, made comment and heard:

- The Chair expressed his concern that recommendation 19 had not been actioned. He was an advocate of the green book and its benefits. The Committee heard that due to the dynamic changing nature it was difficult to produce a book that might continually go out of date; but web resources are being investigated.
- The Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Engagement suggested that it would be useful for the Council's Community Forums to produce within the packs that it is currently working on, a useful list, with contacts of relevant partners.

The update was noted and a further update would be presented to the June 2018 meeting of the Committee.

(C) EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ENFORCEMENT OF TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE LICENSING

Ruth Austen, Environmental Health and Licensing Manager, presented the monitoring action to the Committee, highlighting key points.

The Committee asked questions, made comment and heard:

- The proposed new bracket for the Taxi and Private Hire Plates was circulated.
- Investigations are underway regarding a sign for the inside of the windscreen for Taxis and Private Hires to display.
- Detailed discussions are underway with the Trade regarding roof bubbles
- Regarding safety of students it was confirmed that Officers were working with Highways and the University
- In response to a query about door signs, Ruth Austen advised that discussions are underway with the Trade.
- Potential options for roof bubbles are also under discussion
- The Licensing Committee recently received a report on the Emissions and Age Policy for Taxis and Private Hire; it was broadly supported but more detail was required. A further report will be presented to the Licensing Committee in the Spring 2018.
- "Night out Northampton" is a community safety initiative.
- Training around awareness of hate crime will be introduced for drivers.

The update was noted and a further update would be presented to the June 2018 meeting of the Committee.

7. SCRUTINY PANELS

8. SCRUTINY PANEL 1

Councillor Culbard, Deputy Chair of Scrutiny Panel 1, advised of the work of the Panel so far. It was envisaged that the final report would be presented to the Committee at its April 2018 meeting.

9. SCRUTINY PANEL 2

Councillor Lane, Chair of Scrutiny Panel2, advised of the work of the Panel so far. An additional meeting had been scheduled for further evidence gathering. It was envisaged that the final report would be presented to the Committee at its April 2018 meeting.

10. SCRUTINY PANEL 3

Councillor Russell, Chair of Scrutiny Panel 3, advised of the work of the Panel so far. An additional meeting had been scheduled for further evidence gathering. The value of the UTube videos that have been shown to the Panel around work and research regarding dementia were highlighted. It was envisaged that the final report would be presented to the Committee at its April 2018 meeting.

11. O&S REPROVISION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES CONTRACT WORKING GROUP

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee advised that the next meeting of the Working Group would be held shortly; prior to it a question and answer session with the Cabinet Member for Environment would be held. The question and answer session was open to all Councillors.

12. POTENTIAL FUTURE PRE DECISION SCRUTINY

There was none.

13. URGENT ITEMS

At this point, the Chair reminded the Committee of the date of the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme event.

The meeting concluded at 7:30 pm