




Report of the
Overview & Scrutiny Committee
2007/2008



NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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a message from

Councillor Andrew Simpson, Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Welcome to the third Annual Report of the work of Northampton Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny.

This has been the first year of an expanded Overview and Scrutiny function within the Council with the creation of three new committees and a management committee following the Liberal Democrats taking control of the Council in May 2007.

This has presented us both with opportunities and challenges for Overview and Scrutiny within Northampton Borough.

The opportunity has been there to involve more Councillors in scrutinising the work of the Council and in contributing to its improvement. This has been demonstrated by a number of Reviews ranging from Historic Buildings through to Voluntary Sector funding. Overview and Scrutiny has also demonstrated engagement with the public through one-off pieces of work on issues such as Billing Waste Water, Council housing and Post Office Closures.

With the Government strengthening the role of Scrutiny in looking at partner organisations and moving towards 'scrutiny of place' the future challenge is to look beyond the role of Northampton Borough Council. Overview and Scrutiny needs to involve and work closely with all external partners and organisations who all contribute to the well being of the people of Northampton.

At the same time Overview and Scrutiny needs to demonstrate clearly how it is contributing towards the improvement of Northampton Borough Council and above all helping involve more citizens in its work.

This is even more challenging in a position of limited resources but an increasing workload and responsibility. That's why we are conducting a review of how Overview and Scrutiny works in Northampton, looking at best practice elsewhere and building on experience gained over the last few years. The opportunity is there to really start making a difference to the future of Northampton



**Councillor
Andrew Simpson
Chair, Overview
and Scrutiny
Management Committee**



Introduction

What is Overview and Scrutiny?

Overview and Scrutiny emerged in the Local Government Act 2000 as part of the Government's 'modernisation' agenda. The Act required Local Councils to revisit their existing Committee structures and move towards a model that more closely resembled that of Central Government with its Cabinet and Select Committees.

Overview and Scrutiny is a new way of working for local councils that holds the Executive to account but also an important mechanism for driving forward improvements in services.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny was established to support the development of Overview and Scrutiny nationally. In its 2004 Good Scrutiny Guide it developed the following principles for effective public scrutineers:

Four Principles of effective Overview and Scrutiny

- Provide a 'critical friend' challenge to executives and external authorities
- Reflect the voice and concerns of the public
- Take the lead and own the scrutiny process on behalf of the public
- Make an impact on the delivery of public services

Overview and Scrutiny is led by Councillors. They lead on the review of topics where issues are researched and recommendations developed. They are also involved in setting work programmes for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, bringing forward topics and issues, identifying who they want to hear from to inform their work and what they want to know and how it is presented to them.

Topics for Overview and Scrutiny are identified from a variety of sources. These can include: -

- Issues critical to the Council's improvement
- Topics suggested for review by the Cabinet
- Matters referred from Full Council meetings
- Topics put forward by Overview and Scrutiny Councillors
- The Forward Plan for Cabinet (future decisions)
- Issues raised by members of the public

Call-In of Cabinet decisions

The Cabinet makes key decisions which are decisions that affects more than two wards and/or involves more than £50,000. Within three working days of the minutes of the Cabinet meeting being published, two Councillors may "call in" a decision made at that meeting. This means that Overview and Scrutiny examines the decision to make sure that it was made in the correct way and using robust information. Overview and Scrutiny may recommend that the Cabinet or Full Council should reconsider the decision. It may also be consulted by the Cabinet on forthcoming decisions and the development of policy.

At Northampton, to date, Call-In has been used sparingly, and during 2007/2008 there were just two call ins which showed that the decision making process is transparent and open to constructive challenge.

The Overview and Scrutiny process enables non-Executive Councillors (those who are not on the Cabinet) to influence decisions that are taken by Cabinet and to ensure that the views and needs of local people are taken into account.

Overview and Scrutiny is objective and constructive, aiming to add value to any area it considers.



The Overview and Scrutiny Structure at Northampton

Up to 2005 the Council had seven separate Overview and Scrutiny Committees, each reflecting a Cabinet Portfolio.

As part of the Constitutional changes made in September 2005 this was streamlined down to a single Committee which was then supported by various ad hoc task and finish groups. Whilst this proved effective, it was difficult to maintain the necessary breadth of overview across the range of the Council's activities.

In May 2007, the number of Overview and Scrutiny Committees was increased to three, in addition to the establishment of a Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.

The Committees mirror the Cabinet Portfolios and are identified as: -

- **Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1** (partnerships, regeneration; community safety and community engagement)
- **Overview & Scrutiny Committee 2** (housing and environment)
- **Overview & Scrutiny 3** (improvement, performance and finance)

Overview and Scrutiny Structure



Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee 2007/2008



Councillor Andrew Simpson (Chair)



Councillor Roger Conroy (Vice Chair)



Councillor Joy Capstick



Councillor Jamie Lane



Councillor Christopher Malpas



Councillor Jane Hollis

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee co-ordinates and manages the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The Management Committee comprises six Councillors who will normally be the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees.



The Overview and Scrutiny Structure at Northampton

The Management Committee has the following responsibilities:

- Co-ordinating work programmes
- Allocation of resources
- Allocating areas of responsibility in cases of doubt
- Re-allocation of areas of responsibility in the event of changes to Cabinet Portfolios
- Involvement of other people in Overview and Scrutiny process
- Training and development needs for Overview and Scrutiny Councillors
- Publicising the work of Overview & Scrutiny both within the Council and externally to the public and external organisations
- Evaluating the performance against the four main principles of Overview and Scrutiny

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees set up Task and Finish Groups to review specific issues. These have been a successful feature of Northampton's Overview and Scrutiny process.

The Groups work in more informal and flexible work style, with a smaller number of Councillors, which enables good cross-party working and greater opportunities to develop in-depth knowledge and expertise. Task and Finish groups often bring in outside witnesses or experts to assist in the review as well as hearing from interested members of the public.

This evidence-based process leads to the Task and Finish Groups compiling reports which are considered by the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee before going to Cabinet and/or Full Council.



Overview and Scrutiny making a difference

The fact that Overview and Scrutiny has grown reflects how important Overview and Scrutiny is to the improvement of Northampton Borough Council and to role of the Council in making Northampton a town to be proud of.

Northampton's previous Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertook some good work and was noted for 'good practice' for its call-in procedure and the aim has been to build on that success.

During 2007/2008 the ways that Overview and Scrutiny is delivered has changed and improved the workings of scrutiny: -

- The Overview and Scrutiny Committees have increased from one to four. Three Committees mirror the Cabinet Portfolios with a fourth overarching Management Committee
- Increased dedicated Overview and Scrutiny support has been provided through two Overview and Scrutiny Officers
- Improved systems and processes to support the Overview and Scrutiny process have been introduced
- All Councillors have been supported to get more involved in Overview and Scrutiny through a programme of dedicated Overview and Scrutiny training sessions The Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme has been further developed.
- An Overview and Scrutiny report format for submission to Cabinet has been introduced
- An improved Overview and Scrutiny agenda format has been introduced
- 10 Scrutiny Reviews were conducted which resulted in a number of recommendations to Cabinet. Further details are given in later sections of this Annual Report
- One Joint Scrutiny Review was held which demonstrated the importance of partnership and joint working to deal with issues affecting more than just the Borough Council
- There were two "Call-Ins" which showed that the decision-making process is transparent and open to constructive challenge
- Early in the consultation process Overview and Scrutiny dedicated part of its scheduled meetings to budget consultation and provided comment on the Council's draft budget.



Overview and Scrutiny Adding value to the work of the Council

Overview and Scrutiny adds value because through it Councillors can devote the time to look at issues and problems in depth. They can bring in all the necessary people to speak to them so that they can get a more rounded understanding. Then the evidence collected can be used to put together recommendations for improvement to the Cabinet or Council.

Overview and Scrutiny also provides an opportunity for the public and other stakeholders to access, influence and inform the work of the Council. It enables them to raise issues and contribute to Reviews and Inquiries and also hear first hand issues in more depth than is possible at other Council meetings.

How Overview and Scrutiny contributes to the Council's Corporate Objectives

Overview and Scrutiny supports the Council's five priorities and underpinning commitments and a lot of scrutiny work is developed around these priorities.

The Council's five priorities and underpinning commitments are:

- **We will help our communities become safer, greener and cleaner**
- **We will improve housing and health to enhance the well-being of our communities**
- **We will be a well-managed organisation that puts our customers at the heart of what we do**
- **We will promote economic development and growth in Northampton**
- **We will strengthen our commitment to partnership working and engaging with our communities to deliver better outcomes**



How you can become involved in the work of Overview and Scrutiny

There are a number of ways in which the public and interested organisations can find out about the work of Overview and Scrutiny:-

Attend a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

All Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings are held in public and anyone is welcome to attend to listen to the proceedings.

Only on rare occasions, when certain types of confidential information are being discussed, are members of the public not allowed to attend Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings. As well as wanting to keep people informed about Overview and Scrutiny, the Councillors on the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Task and Finish Groups are keen to hear your views on the topics they are looking at.

There are a number of ways in which the public's views can be heard by the Councillors:-

Write to the Task and Finish Groups

If you have a particular interest in a review you can write to or e-mail the relevant Task and Finish Group to give your views to the Councillors. If you do choose to make a contribution to a Task and Finish Group's review, any comments you make will not be made public unless you have agreed to this.

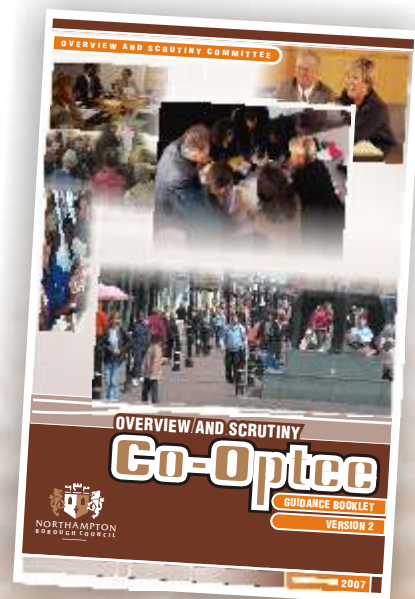
Become a Witness

One of the main ways in which the Task and Finish Groups gather the evidence they need to

inform their reviews is through inviting individuals with a particular knowledge of the subject to attend their meetings and provide evidence. This enables the Councillors to make better informed recommendations but it also gives individuals and organisations from outside the Council a way of having their voice heard.

Become a co-opted member to a Task and Finish Group

If you have knowledge or expertise in the topic being reviewed, become a co-opted member to the Task and Finish Group. Co-opted members are normally representatives of groups or organisations or members of the public with specific or relevant expertise external to the Council. Overview and Scrutiny has put together a Co-Optee Handbook that gives brief details the roles of a Co-Opted member.



Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Management Committee



Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee has overall responsibility for co-ordinating, managing and developing the scrutiny process.

The Committee has introduced a number of changes as part of an ongoing process of review and development, which aims to ensure that we continually improved Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton.

The Key Changes

- Improved performance management monitoring for all Overview and Scrutiny Committees
- Introduction of Equality Impact Assessments for all Task and Finish reviews
- Improved project management practices for Task and Finish reviews
- Introduction of Appreciative Inquiries
- Introduction of a dedicated Overview and Scrutiny training programme for all Councillors
- Initiation of an evaluation of the performance of the Overview and Scrutiny process using the Centre for Public Scrutiny framework

What are the future challenges for Overview and Scrutiny?

Countywide Joint Scrutiny

There are some further challenges arising from the impending Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (2007) (LGPI), which widens the remit of Overview and Scrutiny functions. Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton decided to meet informally with the other District and Borough Scrutiny Teams to start to get a common understanding of what needs to be done in the future, with regard to: -

- Scrutiny in a two-tier area and county wide scrutiny
- Partner scrutiny - scrutiny of external agencies in the area
- Requiring external partners to supply information to Overview and Scrutiny Committees
- Scrutiny of matters of importance to local communities
- Scrutiny of Local Area Agreements Round 2 (LAA2)

Meetings have been held with Scrutiny Teams at the neighbouring authorities and have been met with enthusiasm for the proposal. Work will continue over the next few months.



Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)

Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) will replace Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). This is a major change to the current assessment system following the passing of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (2007). CAA will look at the public services in an area delivered by councils and their partners, including the private and voluntary sector. CAA aims to be more relevant to local people by focussing on issues that are important to their community. It will also develop a shared view about the challenges facing an area, such as crime, community cohesion, a sustainable environment or public health issues and will also create a more joined-up and proportionate approach to public service regulation.

Local Area Agreements Round 2 (LAA2)

Local Area Agreements (LAAs) set out the priorities for a local area agreed between central government and the local authority, Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and other key partners at a local level. LAAs simplify some central funding, help join up public services more effectively and allow greater flexibility for local solutions to local issues.

Evaluation of Overview and Scrutiny

The objective of this review is to evaluate the performance of Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton using the Centre for Public Scrutiny's framework. The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee has instructed the Overview and Scrutiny Team to start the evaluation process and report progress. It is

envisage that the evaluation will conclude in 2008, making recommendations for further development and improvement to the Overview and Scrutiny process at Northampton.

Resourcing Overview and Scrutiny

A key challenge with an expanding role for Overview and Scrutiny is how it will be resourced in the future. The Management Committee has been looking at this to ensure prioritisation of work within the current resources, but also to see where additional support is needed. The evaluation is also helping inform this going forward. With an increased Cabinet workload there is a knock-on effect to Overview & Scrutiny if it is to adequately provide the function of a 'critical friend'. This will need resourcing both in arranging support for meetings and reviews but also in Councillor participation.

Improving Public Involvement

Development of Overview and Scrutiny relies on engagement and involvement of the public in order to succeed. The Management Committee is looking to develop how Overview and Scrutiny encourages more people to 'get involved' in what the Council does through contributing to Scrutiny Reviews and in raising issues with the Council and inputting into future work programmes.



Overview & Scrutiny Committee

1

Partnerships, Regeneration, Community Safety and Engagement



Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1

Partnerships, Regeneration, Community Safety and Engagement

welcome from

Councillor Andrew Simpson, Chair, Overview and Scrutiny 1

It's been a busy year for the Committee with five reviews, one Call-In, one Special Inquiry and a number of consultation Reviews and reports to Cabinet.

The year kicked off with two reviews on Voluntary Sector Funding and Community Engagement both were urgent items providing an opportunity for Overview and Scrutiny to input into future Cabinet decisions.

We then had a Special Inquiry into the proposed closure of seven Post Offices in Northampton which enabled Councillors, the public and the Post Offices affected to try and influence Post Office Ltd in deciding which to close. This Inquiry undoubtedly helped save one office in the town.

Three further reviews have been completed one on Historic Buildings, one on the Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) (as proposed in the Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act (LGPIH)) and a third jointly with the County Council on Alcohol Related Violence and the use of Polycarbonate Glasses.

There was also a Call-In from the Cabinet decision over Voluntary Sector Funding which was upheld and resulted in the Cabinet revisiting a previous decision.

The Committee has also provided comments on national Government consultations and looked at some specific issues raised by the public and Councillors and made recommendations to Cabinet.

The future challenge is to respond to new powers for Overview and Scrutiny under the LGPIH Act and to develop the scrutiny of Crime and Disorder matters.

Involving more partner organisations and the public in future reviews will be essential for continued success.

I would like to thank all Councillors, Council staff, external organisations, and above all, members of the public who have contributed to this year's packed work programme.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A Simpson".

**Councillor
Andrew Simpson
Chair, Overview
and Scrutiny
Management Committee**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 has a wide-ranging agenda, which seeks to examine and influence policies under its remit of partnerships, regeneration, community safety and community engagement.

Key outcomes and achievements

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 successfully oversaw and delivered a number of reviews during 2007/2008, interviewing key witnesses, undertaking desktop research, looking at models of best practice and gathering statistical information and data to aid the review process.

Reviews for 2007/2008 included: -

Alcohol Related Violence/Polycarbonate glasses

This was a joint review with Northamptonshire County Council. The objective of the review was to identify the benefits to well being accrued through the introduction of polycarbonate glasses within specified localities such as city centres, sporting and leisure venues.

The Review acknowledged that the Council's Licensing Committee is already introducing the use of polycarbonate glasses in its licensing conditions but this report, together with its extensive research, provides evidence in support of such conditions

Key findings:

- As proven by diverse urban contexts in the UK, the use of polycarbonate glasses can be efficiently introduced/enforced in town centres via locally-appropriate combinations of Local Government Act 2000 'promotion of well-being' powers, byelaws, licensing conditions and/or voluntary-based campaigns.
- Polycarbonate glasses have been introduced most efficiently, and have yielded the most positive outcomes, where there has been close consultation, partnership and agreement between Local Authorities and local licensees/publicans/landlords and other stakeholders
- A number of misconceptions currently characterise public perceptions of polycarbonate glasses (e.g. they are 'wibbly wobbly' plastic; they have a significant financial/environmental cost compared to glass; they are unhygienic). From consultation with users of Northampton's 'leisure zone', it is evident that perceptions of polycarbonate glasses improve markedly once users handle/use a polycarbonate vessel for the first time. There is therefore a need to undertake educational/promotional work preceding or accompanying the introduction of polycarbonate glasses
- Should polycarbonate glasses be introduced in Northampton's 'leisure zone', there is a need to evaluate in a robust and ongoing way the outcomes of such an intervention.
- Although the introduction of polycarbonate glasses is proven to have numerous positive outcomes, it must be remembered that polycarbonate glasses are not a 'magic bullet' cure for issues of alcohol-related violence.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

Key Outcomes

- Evidence was obtained that proves the beneficial effect of introducing polycarbonate glasses and which supports their introduction where appropriate
- A report was provided to both the Chair of Licensing and Leader of the Council
- Northampton Borough Council's current approach was endorsed by the findings
- A greater understanding was provided of the effect of using polycarbonate glasses and a recognition that they do not solve all issues associated with alcohol related violence

- Funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector under the Partnership Fund should be on a minimum three-yearly basis and only Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations should be funded from the Voluntary and Community Sector grants pot.
- Interim arrangements for those organisations currently funded for one year (to end 31 March 2008) should be put in place and clearly communicated to organisations concerned no later than 30 November 2007.
- A feasibility study is carried out to ascertain whether the administrative function for grant applications should be outsourced.
- The Council develops a Commissioning Strategy for the provision of services to meet the Council's corporate objectives.

Voluntary Sector Funding/Partnerships

The purpose of this review was to make recommendations to the Cabinet to assist in the budget process and medium term financial strategy for 2008-2011. To also review the organisations currently being funded and to review the overall Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) partnership strategy against the national situation of funding.

Key recommendations included: -

- A minimum of £700,000 is ringfenced in the budget for 2008/2009 for Voluntary Sector grants ahead of the full budget process so that the grant application process can proceed between now and March 2008 £50,000 of this sum be allocated to a 'Small Grants pot'.

Key Outcomes

By the end of the Municipal year, Cabinet had actioned the first five of the eight recommendations of the report :-

- That a Senior Officer, minimum of Corporate Manager level, is explicitly identified as being responsible for the relationship with the Voluntary Sector.
- That funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector under the Partnership Fund be on a minimum three-yearly basis.
- That only Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations should be funded from the Voluntary and Community Sector grants pot.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

Key Outcomes

- That interim arrangements for those organisations currently funded for one year (to end 31 March 2008) should be put in place and clearly communicated to organisations concerned no later than 30 November 2007.
- That the Council develops a Commissioning Strategy for the provision of services to meet the Council's corporate objectives.

Cabinet made an amendment to the Task and Finish Group's recommendation 4 to read "The budget for the Community Enabling Fund will be for those organisations that have in the past been funded from the budget plus any new organisations meeting the funding criteria for CEFAP" is noted. This decision was called in at a later date and details are given on page 31 of the Annual Report. Cabinet asked for further work to be undertaken during 2008/09 to consider the implications of recommendations 6-8, as detailed below, and to develop alternative proposals in relation to the future funding, commissioning and administration of support to the voluntary and community sector: -

- That the Administration decides which of the currently funded organisations will be mainstream funded with funding linked to the corporate objectives and Council departments.

- That a feasibility study be carried out to ascertain whether the administrative function for grant applications should be outsourced.
- That the Council develops a Commissioning Strategy for the provision of services to meet the Council's corporate objectives.

Following monitoring activity that was carried out during December it was proposed to re-convene this Task and Finish Group later this year to find out whether further scrutiny work needs to be carried out.

Community Engagement

This review focussed on Northampton Borough Council's engagement activities, including neighbourhood management and to Review how community engagement could be improved and what Groups the Council should be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new and difficult to reach communities who are not currently represented.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

The review agreed that the following needed to be investigated and linked to the achievement of the Council's corporate priorities: -

- An analysis of the Council's current method of engagement, including successes and failures of engaging with the community
- A synopsis of all information currently available
- Officer reports/presentations
- Maps showing how areas are currently geographically split
- Best practice external to Northampton
- Witness interviews/evidence
- The mechanisms for receiving public feedback be examined and a policy produced.
- The philosophy of Neighbourhood Management is extended across the whole town. Each area should have its own Communication / Participation Plan that is resourced by the Council. Within this there should be a feedback mechanism. Neighbourhood Partnerships should be fully resourced in order that their role can be enhanced and that they form part of each area's plan should this be appropriate for that area.
- The Council recognises that in order to consult with hard to reach groups it will have to consider how best to inform those in the community whose contact with the Council is minimal.

This review linked to the Council's corporate priorities as it demonstrated listening to local people and providing the services that they need.

Key recommendations included:

- A Strategy for Community Engagement should be devised which reflects organisational priorities and increased partnership working in accordance with the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) devolved structures.
- For the public to be more trusting of the Council, it has to be open and transparent in reporting all of its activities. All public information should therefore be widely available and published.

Key Outcomes

- Cabinet adopted all of the Review's recommendations subject to the adoption of the Council's Community Engagement Strategy
- In response to the recommendations of the Review, a Community Engagement Strategy was developed that established the key principles through which the Council would carry out community engagement activity



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1



St. Marks Church, Green Street

Historic Buildings/Regeneration Opportunities

This review came about because of the demolition of The Maltings and St Marks Church. Councillors wanted to review the current powers and those of partner organisations that might be used to prevent the loss of further historic buildings in the town. The review also investigated the extent of the Borough Conservation areas including the managed plan programme in hand. Proposals for mapping of buildings that are not listed but are of value to the town were considered and the group compared Northampton Borough Council's conservation service in relation to other similar Councils.

The review acknowledged that the Council's relationship and partnership arrangements with West Northamptonshire Development Corporation (WNDC) needed to be improved with regards to historic buildings and heritage sites. Working protocols on the way in which conservation issues will be dealt with before the

planning application stage need to be developed to ensure that the West Northamptonshire Development Corporation is considering conservation issues at an early stage of regeneration proposal development.

New conservation legislation should enable Councils to provide better protection to historic buildings. Until this time one of the few ways in which to protect buildings is to establish a conservation area.

Key recommendations included:

- Additional resources to the conservation service are required in order to ensure that there is sufficient resource available to respond to the emerging legislation on the protection of historic buildings and ensure that there is sufficient resource available to deal with the increasing demands placed upon the service as a result of growing levels of regeneration.
- Cabinet was asked to instruct Officers to:
- Bring forward proposals to map buildings that are not listed, but of value to the town
- Bring forward proposals to adopt the secondary list; this would recognise that these buildings are important and that the Council would wish to protect them
- Work with our partners to review county archaeological advice and storage arrangements.
- Examine the feasibility of building a physical and computer model of Northampton central area, so that an understanding can be gained of the potential impact of proposed new developments on historic buildings.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

Key Outcomes

- Although Cabinet rejected the recommendation for additional staffing (a team of six Officers) it is possible that there may be opportunities for at least one if not two additional Officers to be appointed for a short period
- Key stakeholders will be consulted on the proposal to promote a Civic Trust for Northampton
- The need to bring forward proposals to map buildings that are not listed but are of value to the town was accepted
- Adoption of the 'local list' was agreed
- A review of county archaeological advice and storage arrangements was agreed
- Feasibility study into the construction of a physical or computer model of Northampton central area
- All Councillors were given the opportunity to see a presentation about the site of Northampton Castle and so gain a greater understanding of its historical importance



Review of proposed Post Office closures in the Borough

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1, on behalf of the Council, held a short, focused Inquiry in response to Post Office Ltd's consultation on the proposal to close seven Post Offices in the Borough of Northampton. This was part of the national 'Network Change Programme' agreed by Government that would see 2,500 post office branches across the country close.

The Committee presented its fully-evidenced report, together with three key recommendations to Cabinet: -

- 1. The Council must provide the following updated information to Post Office Limited by January 10th 2008;-
 - Demographics
 - Population and proposed new settlements
 - Growth, regeneration and development plans
 - An assessment of the economic impact of closure where possible



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

- 2. Agree the evidence presented in this report as part of the council's formal submission to the Post Office Ltd
- 3. The Council improves its ability to respond to consultation requests from external bodies in a timely manner, and uses Overview and Scrutiny to assist in responses where appropriate.

Cabinet accepted the report and its recommendations and Post Office Limited was asked to reconsider its proposals in the light of community information and more detailed information on planned regeneration and growth in the areas surrounding the proposed closure sites. As a result Post Office Limited decided not to close the Post Office at Gloucester Avenue.

Key Outcomes

- The public, Councillors and other stakeholders were able to provide input into Post Office Ltd's proposed closure programme and influence the outcome.
- Overview & Scrutiny was successfully able to cross examine the proposals from an external organisation that would affect the well being of Northampton residents
- This review demonstrated Overview and Scrutiny making a real difference. The result of one of its inquiries made changes to Post Office Ltd's proposals.

Councillor Call for Action (CCfA)

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 enables Councillors to refer a local matter to Scrutiny. The aim of this new measure, which has become known as the 'Councillor Call for Action' is to help frontline Councillors raise matters on an authority's agenda on behalf of their constituents where all the usual courses of action have failed to resolve the matter. It will be up to Overview and Scrutiny to determine whether or not to hold a Scrutiny enquiry into the matter and to respond. This indicates a gauge of support for frontline Councillors and is a clear recognition by Government of the role of Overview and Scrutiny in contributing to community leadership.

A Task and Finish Group was set up to look at a way forward for this Council prior to the legislation being implemented. It was a real opportunity for Overview and Scrutiny to be involved in policy development for the Council and the proposed pilot scheme for CCfA sets Northampton Borough Council at the forefront of establishing this new initiative. There will be further work required as the pilot is tested and the Task and Finish group hopes that all Councillors will use the opportunity to be involved in this area of legislation. There are challenges to bringing Partner Organisations into this process as well as informing the public how this enhances the role of their elected representatives and provides a clear route for some issues to be tackled.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

Key recommendations included:

- The draft procedure and guidelines for the Councillor Call for Action be adopted for implementation as a pilot scheme and following the pilot any further revisions are made to the scheme and brought back for final approval.
- Should the relevant legislation come into force during the pilot that the Policy and Governance Manager is authorised (a) to make any minor modifications that may be required once guidance has been issued and (b) to recommend to Council the necessary amendments the council's constitution.
- Cabinet makes available sufficient resources to set up and test a pilot Councilor Call for Action process (including support for publicity, training and team briefing where applicable)
- In relation to the Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act, further consideration be given to; (a) the external scrutiny of LAA partners' delivery of local improvement targets and; (b) scrutiny of crime and disorder matters, together with the overview and scrutiny committee structure most appropriate to exercising these powers; (c) the handling of Local Petitions as defined in the LGPIH Act within Northampton Borough Council.
- That the additional scrutiny powers contained in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 be included in the Council's constitution once brought into force.

Key Outcomes

- Initial discussions on joint working on CCfA was established with Northamptonshire County Council
- The Group provided the basis for the Council's response to the Government's consultation over CCfA and Petitions
- Further outcomes are not yet known. Report to be presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 14 July 2008



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

County Council Schools Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and the loss of school playing fields

A member of the public attended an Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 and advised Councillors of their concerns about the loss of school playing fields. They raised the issue that in order for the County Council to be able to fund the PFI scheme, it was selling off school playing fields and that developed community use on the sites was not always taking place. The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 felt that this was an important issue for his Committee to scrutinise and it was discussed at the meeting held on 15 May 2008. The Committee gave this issue full consideration at its meeting and the following recommendations were agreed and were presented to Cabinet: -

- That Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 requests Cabinet to seek confirmation from WDC that Managed Community Access agreements have been put in place in respect of former school sites that have been developed under both the PFI scheme and where land has been sold and developed for housing.
- That Cabinet instructs officers to seek clarification from WDC how NBC's and other consultees' comments were applied in deciding the planning applications for former school sites; in particular in relation to NBC's statement published in 2003 with regards to surplus school sites and issues

raised by the NBC's Planning Committee's comments in February 2007.

- That Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 recommends that Cabinet ensures that the Borough's 2003 planning statement on surplus school sites, "Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Assessment Audit and Playing Pitch Strategy" are incorporated into the emerging new Local Development Framework as a matter of urgency.
- That Cabinet provides a response to a future meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 on recommendation 1, 2 and 3 above.
- That Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 informs Cabinet that a response from the Director of WDC to the Development, Building Control and Environmental Health Corporate Manager's letter of 12 February 2007 has not been received.

Key Outcomes

- The Committee established that there did appear to be an issue with regards to the use of former school sites for development and managed community access agreements for PFI school sites.
- Further Outcomes are not yet known. Report to be presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 14 July 2008



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

Call-In of Cabinet decisions

Overview and Scrutiny 1 has looked at one 'Call-In' over the last year as follows:

Alteration to the Task and Finish Group recommendations regarding Community Enabling Fund Advisory Panel (CEFAP)

When Cabinet received the review report on Voluntary Sector Funding/Partnerships it amended recommendation 4 - "That only Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations should be funded from the Voluntary and Community Sector grants pot" to read: -

"The budget for the Community Enabling Fund will be for those organisations that have in the past been funded from the budget plus any new organisations meeting the funding for CEFAP".

The above decision was called in by Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1. The basis of the Call-In was to help ensure that the funding process was carried out fairly, ensuring that all groups had an equal chance of applying for funding. It was requested that an urgent meeting of Cabinet be set to discuss the Call-In to reduce any possible delay of funding to the Voluntary Sector. There was concern about groups applying for and receiving money outside the procedures laid down. The worry being that anyone not funded could challenge the process.

The Committee upheld the Call-In and its recommendations were accepted by Cabinet.

Key Outcomes

Cabinet resolved that: -

- That the CEFAP criteria be amended so that Voluntary Sector Groups that were funded in 2007 and 2008, and met the requirements of CEFAP, can be considered for financial support again in the forthcoming year.
- That Cabinet requests Officers to bring forward a further report later in the year with recommendations for a thorough and robust process of grant funding the voluntary and community sector in the future.

The year ahead

Next year's work programme

During 2008/2009 the Committee wants to be as flexible as possible and not take on too much planned work, which might prevent Overview and Scrutiny from being able to react to any new issues that might arise.

Issues programmed in for 2008/2009 include: -

- Work surrounding Northampton Safer Stronger Communities and Partnerships
- Partnership working with West Northants Development Corporation
- Concessionary Fares Appreciative Enquiry



Overview & Scrutiny Committee **2**

Housing and Environment



Overview & Scrutiny Committee **2**

Housing and Environment

welcome from

Councillor Christopher Malpas, Chair, Overview and Scrutiny 2

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2, with responsibility for housing and environment, came into action in May 2007. Over the course of the year we have carried out a number of detailed and productive in-depth reviews, covering issues that are of high importance on both the local and national agendas, setting up Task and Finish Groups to pursue in-depth Review work. Details of the review work can be found on page 31. The work programme has been a challenging one in 2007/2008 and as a Committee we have sought to learn from the best through our research.

The Committee continues to monitor progress on the work that it has done previously to make sure the recommendations are being carried out.

The Committee also looks regularly at how the Council performs against national and local performance indicators for housing and environment.

I anticipate further progress over the next year and in 2008/2009 we will be focussing our wide-ranging remit on some specific areas where we can seek to add real value to housing and environmental issues.



**Councillor
Christopher Malpas
Chair, Overview
and Scrutiny
Committee 2**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 has an extensive agenda that includes all housing and environmental issues of the borough.

Making a difference

During 2007/2008 this Committee has: -

- Completed one review in detail
- Jointly with Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3, has started an Appreciative Inquiry into Initial Private Sector Housing
- Received witness evidence from the local MP regarding housing best value performance indicators
- Considered the Call-In to Cabinet's recommendations on Robinson House

Key outcomes and achievements

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 successfully oversaw and delivered one review during 2007/2008: -

Billing Waste Water Working Party

In November 2007, representatives from a local group, CLEAN, addressed Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2, conveying its concerns about Billing Sewerage Station; in particular problems with odour emissions. CLEAN is an action group that purports to represent local businesses, householders and neighbours of the Anglian Water Waste Water Treatment Works. CLEAN has actively campaigned to ensure that the Council serves an Abatement Notice on Anglian Water.

In response to the concerns raised, the Committee set up a Working Party to review and



evaluate the evidence to establish whether there was a statutory nuisance and to identify the range of alternative options to move forward and make recommendations.

After undertaking comprehensive research and receiving evidence from a variety of sources, it was concluded that: -

Key findings and recommendations: -

- The Working Party has seen sufficient evidence to acknowledge that the work of Northampton Borough Council's Environmental Health Officers has been robust and professional; however to ensure continued improvements to the service, the Environmental Health Department carries out periodic reviews to ensure that their working practices continue to be in line with national standards and Government guidance
- At this time having given consideration to the weight of evidence and balance



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2

- Between that evidence and the current and planned works by Anglian Water, the Working Party considers that little or no benefit would be gained through the service of an Abatement Notice and specifically notes that remedial works outlined within such an Abatement Notice would not necessarily resolve any future potential nuisances given the nature of the activity
- Notwithstanding the above statement; given the factors affecting the possibility of any potential future nuisance due to the nature of the activity and the many causative factors, it is recommended that a robust proactive continuous monitoring regime is put in place by the Council's Environmental Health Department to ensure that the planned improvements reduce odour omissions and that should they fail to do so there is evidence to support any necessary action
- The evidence collected by this Working Party is forwarded onto West Northamptonshire Development Corporation (WNDC) for its information in the consideration of any planning applications submitted by Anglian Water
- Anglian Water is taking and will continue to take appropriate action to manage the odour, working closely with the Council's Environmental Health Officers
- The Council's Environmental Health Officers are contacting each petitioner within the Northampton Borough Boundary, and will forward the rest of the petition to Wellingborough Borough Council for action according to their processes
- The report, together with its recommendations, will be presented to Cabinet in the Municipal Year 2008/2009.

Key Outcomes

- Not known. Report will be presented to Cabinet late summer/early autumn 2008.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2

Private Sector Housing Strategy (Disability Facilities Grants- joint review with Committee Two)

This review followed the format of an Appreciative Inquiry. A small group of Councillors worked with officers from Housing

Services, carrying out the investigative work.

Work is still underway and the final report will be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committees 2 and 3 early in the Municipal Year 2008/2009. Services, carrying out the investigative work. The Group met with officers on a number of occasions to look at various elements of the Council's involvement in managing the grants application and approval process. This included looking at an overview of the overall condition of all of Northampton's Housing stock, the use of powers to bring empty homes back into occupation, the process of establishing need for



Disabled Facilities Grants, the application process for that grant, the different ways Council tenants and home owners qualified for and could access help, the way Private Sector Improvement Grants were used and how and when other funding streams could be engaged by those needing help. By then, the work of the Council was on the way to being back on track. Funding had been provided, an officer post was identified as necessary to be appointed to put in place and control the work required to bring the waiting list back to where it should be.

It was decided to stand the Group down to await the publication of the new Strategy Document, currently in course of preparation, that will cover this area of work. At that point it is proposed that the Group will reconvene to scrutinise that Strategy.

Key Outcomes

- Not known. The Group will re-convene when the Private Sector Housing Strategy document has been published and will then report its findings.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2

Housing Best Value Performance Indicators

Sally Keeble, MP, was asked to provide witness evidence at an Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 meeting, when it looked at housing performance indicators.

She provided comment on the Council's procedures and processes for housing services and offered advice on areas for improvement.

Call-In Robinson House

As part of the consultation process for the proposed closure of Robinson House, Overview and Scrutiny considered the proposal and forwarded its concerns and comments to Cabinet: -

- That Ward Councillors, Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 and local residents are fully consulted throughout the development of this scheme
- That Cabinet should not delegate the decision to an individual Cabinet Member



- That officers are instructed to carry out further work to establish the use of all Council properties affected by the proposals
- That Cabinet requires the Chief Executive to ensure that all officers consult Ward Councillors on issues relating to their ward

Cabinet then investigated the proposals regarding the closure of Robinson House, which was the start of consultation. Robinson House had been unsatisfactory premises for many years and it was the chance to give those who lived there the opportunity to have a more suitable tenancy. All single persons' accommodation had been looked at, but only Robinson House had management problems. Thirty-four of the forty-two residents had registered for transfer. The other five single-person units were not in locations conducive to this particular type of scheme. Disabled Facilities Grants could not have been applied for unless a premise had been identified. Cabinet appreciated that this was an emotive issue but that the premises in their present stated caused problems and were inadequate and that one outcome of the proposal was that the closure of Robinson House would remove the problems and that there needed to be discussions as to what was required.

Cabinet resolved: -

- That the success of the bid to Communities and Local Government be noted.
- That the comments made by Overview and Scrutiny Committee who considered the report as an item of urgent business at their meeting on 1 April be noted.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2

- That Cabinet in the future considers the principle of progressive closure of Robinson House, subject to the outcome of consultations referred to in the body of the report.
- That the outcome of the consultations be brought to Cabinet at the earliest opportunity to decide whether Robinson House should be closed.
- Should the closure be approved, calls for a further report are to be submitted to Cabinet (and to Overview and Scrutiny) once outstanding details of the scheme have been agreed in principle with the Council's partners, to include options for the future use and siting of central Northampton facilities.

The decision by Cabinet regarding Robinson House was called in for the following reasons: -

- Information on how the site was identified has not been provided. We therefore request that the Overview and Scrutiny Officers obtain details of the studies, if any, conducted to identify suitable sites for this facility, including the criteria used in their assessment, the reasons for selecting the site of Robinson House in preference to alternatives, and the reason for excluding public consultation from this process
- The precise consultation process and timescales have not been outlined. We request that officers provide detailed information on this at the committee meeting

Key Outcomes

- Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 rejected this Call-In on the grounds that Officers would be carrying out consultation on the possible closure of Robinson House and would provide further information to Overview and Scrutiny before Cabinet took a decision on this issue.
- The Call-In enabled a greater understanding to be provided about the proposals and for the public and other stakeholders to express their opinions on the initial plans

The year ahead

In line with the Overview and Scrutiny work programme for 2008/2009, the Committee also wants to be as flexible as possible and not take on too much planned work, which might prevent Overview and Scrutiny from being able to respond to any new issues that might arise.

Issues programmed in for 2008/2009 include: -

- Review of parks and grounds maintenance: To investigate the service and improve the experience of local people and visitors as a result
- HRA Asset Management Strategy: Improve safety both in the home and the environment
- Registered Social Landlords: To investigate how the Council currently works in partnership with this sector and to improve the relationship and service received as a result
- Tenancy occupation and subletting: To investigate tenancies with particular focus on subletting of property



Overview & Scrutiny Committee **3**

Finance, Performance and Improvement



Overview & Scrutiny Committee **3**

Finance, Performance and Improvement

welcome from

Councillor Jamie Lane, Chair, Overview and Scrutiny 3

I am pleased to present the first annual report by Northampton Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 for Improvement, Performance and Finance. This report looks at our activities over the past 12 months and our plans for the coming year.

We have been busy analysing performance measures and looking at ways of improving them.

We have set up a number of Task and Finish Groups to look at:-

- Monitoring and budget programme
- Disabled Facilities Grants (joint with Overview and Scrutiny 2)
- Sustainable Procurement

Our future work is going to look at absenteeism and new recording systems for Best Value Performance.

I would like to thank the Overview and Scrutiny Team for its support and commitment during the year and to all the Councillors who sit on this Committee.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jamie Lane', written over a light-colored background.

**Councillor
Jamie Lane
Chair, Overview
and Scrutiny
Committee 3**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3

The agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 seeks to examine and influence policies under its remit of improvement, performance and finance.

Key outcomes and achievements

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 successfully oversaw and delivered two reviews and one joint review during 2007/2008, interviewing key witnesses, undertaking desktop research, looking at models of best practice and gathering statistical information and data to aid the review process.

Budget consultation

Like its associate Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 took part in the budget consultation process, making comment early on in the process.

Performance Monitoring

A significant role for this Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to undertake performance and financial monitoring, which has provided the information necessary to identify areas where further work is needed. At its meetings, the Committee regularly scrutinises the Council's performance indicators in detail, holding the Portfolio Holder to account.

Draft Procurement Strategy

At one of its meetings, Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 provided an input into the draft Procurement Strategy, looking at it in detail and providing relevant comment.

Monitoring and Budget Programme

A review was set up to look at putting in place a structure to enable the ongoing monitoring of performance and financial data of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3, so that systems can be established that provide clear, consistent information that enables Councillors and the general public to understand finance and performance monitoring information.

The review was put on hold until the Councilor Call For Action Task and Finish Group had concluded its work. Now that this is completed, the Group will work with the Corporate Manager and produce its report and recommendations for presentation to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 and then onto Cabinet for consideration.

Key Outcomes

- Not known. Report will be presented to Cabinet during the Municipal year 2008/09.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3

Private Sector Housing Strategy (Disabled Facilities Grants - joint Review with Committee Two)

This review followed the format of an Appreciative Inquiry. A small group of Councillors worked with officers from Housing Services, carrying out the investigative work.

The Group met with officers on a number of occasions to look at various elements of the Council's involvement in managing the grants application and approval process. This included looking at an overview of the overall condition of all of Northampton's Housing stock, the use of

powers to bring empty homes back into occupation, the process of establishing need for Disabled Facilities Grants, the application process for that grant, the different ways Council tenants and home owners qualified for and could access help, the way Private Sector Improvement Grants were used and how and when other funding streams could be engaged by those needing help. By then the work of the Council was on the way to being back on track. Funding had been provided, an officer post was identified as necessary to be appointed to put in place and control the work required to bring the waiting list back to where it should be.

It was decided to stand the Group down to await the publication of the new Strategy Document, currently in course of preparation, that will cover this area of work. At that point it is proposed that the Group will reconvene to scrutinise that Strategy.



Key Outcomes

- Not known. The Group will re-convene when the Private Sector Housing Strategy document has been published and will then report its findings.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3

Sustainable Procurement Policy

A Working Group was set up to review the delivery of carbon-neutral services. As part of the evidence gathering process it was realised that the Council needs to undertake a lot of work in the delivery of carbon-neutral services, bearing this in mind, the Working Group realised that it would not be able to complete the review in the allocated timescale and asked the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee to suspend the review to a later date.



The year ahead

For the forthcoming year, Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 has not as yet taken on any planned work.

It has been suggested that a Task and Finish Group be established to examine the high levels of sickness absence in the authority and a review on the new recording systems for Best Value Performance.

When suggesting further issues it will identify suitable priorities for future scrutiny examination.





Contact details

for more information

The Overview and Scrutiny Team consists of Mark Farmer-Ward and Tracy Tiff. They are always very happy to speak to local people about the activities of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. If you have any comments or queries, or would like to suggest areas which may be appropriate topics for future work, you can speak to them by

 01604 837046/837408

 Scrutiny@northampton.gov.uk

You can view recent agendas and minutes on the Council's website at www.northampton.gov.uk or by contacting Meeting Services.

Overview and Scrutiny has its own dedicated website within the Council's website. The current work of Overview and Scrutiny and the reports already published are available on this site.

 www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny

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