

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 28 November 2016

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillor Jamie Lane (Chair); Councillor Graham Walker (Deputy Chair); Councillors Tony Ansell, Rufia Ashraf, Mohammed Aziz, Vicky Culbard, Janice Duffy, Elizabeth Gowen, Mary Markham, Dennis Meredith, Sam Shaw and Zoe Smith

Councillor Jonathan Nunn, Leader of the Council
David Kennedy, Chief Executive, NBC
Councillor Mike Hallam, Cabinet Member for Environment
Julie Seddon, Director for Customers and Communities
Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer

Observing Councillor Phil Larratt, Deputy Leader of the Council

Members of the Public Colin Bricher

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor John Caswell, Councillor Brian Sargeant and Councillor Terrie Eales.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2016 were signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

Mr Colin Bricher addressed the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on agenda item 5 – Unitary Status.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

There were none.

5. UNITARY STATUS

Mr Colin Bricher addressed the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He advised he has advocated unitary authorities for many years. He commented that he had addressed other meetings regarding the Unitary options for the county; commenting further on the option

being investigated by Northamptonshire County Council. He said that in his opinion no decision can be made in isolation and that other Local Authorities need to be dealt with. Mr Bricher went on to comment that any Northampton based authority would need to extend far enough north and south to avoid the current scenario whereby the borough is effectively surrounded. He added that Northampton was originally a county borough and it is important that whatever is done that our town remains strategically important. He referred to the idea of ridings and in his opinion its potential advantages. Mr Bricher closed his address by advising he did not support the notion of North Londonshire.

Mr Bricher was thanked for his address.

Councillor Jonathan Nunn, Leader of the Council, and David Kennedy, Chief Executive, provided the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on Unitary Status.

The Committee heard:

- The Leader and Deputy Leader, NBC, had attended a recent meeting at Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) and had heard from Baroness Scott who had taken Wiltshire County Council to Unitary Status. This was the preferred option of NCC. NCC has undertaken some work regarding a Countywide Unitary model.
- The Boroughs and Districts within Northamptonshire have varying views regarding Unitary; however, the majority do support Unitary. There is a need for a collective agreement on the proposed model for Unitary Status.

AGREED: That the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive are asked to provide a further update to a future meeting of the Committee.

6. CEMETERIES

Councillor Mike Hallam, Cabinet Member for Environment, and Julie Seddon, Director for Customers and Communities, addressed the Committee. Councillor Mike Hallam referred the Committee to an excellent report that had been produced on allotments. Short, medium and long term objectives had been produced. Councillor Hallam suggested that a similar approach for cemeteries would be the best way forward. He added that he had already met with various Residents' Associations in respect of cemeteries.

The Committee made comment, asked questions and heard:

- Councillors were pleased that work was moving forward on cemeteries
- Damage that had been caused in the cemeteries was referred to
- There is a need for toilet facilities in certain cemeteries, however, it was realised that this could be a long term aspiration. It was noted that Towcester Road cemetery does have the provision of a toilet but the facility needs cleaning so that it is a usable facility.
- It was noted that there is outstanding work around the war graves.
- Damage and anti-social behaviour at the Gate House, Billing Cemetery was commented upon.

- It was suggested that it would be useful for a Scrutiny Panel or Working Group to be set up to scope, and carry out a review on cemeteries

AGREED: (1) That the Cabinet Member for Environment is asked to provide an update on cemeteries at the next meeting of the Committee
 (2) That the issue of cemeteries is referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programming event in April 2017.

7. SUSTAINABLE PLAY EQUIPMENT.

Councillor Mike Hallam, Cabinet Member for Environment, and Julie Seddon, Director for Customers and Communities advised the Committee on work that has been undertaken regarding sustainable play equipment. Councillor Hallam added that it has been realised that there is a need to include maintenance of play equipment in the Environmental Services Contract; however there is a need for maintenance to take place prior to the new contract. A budget of £15,000 per year has been identified for maintenance and replacement of play equipment. An Audit of play equipment has been undertaken. Equipment has been ordered for a number of parks.

The Committee asked questions, made comment and heard:

- In response to a query regarding vandalised play equipment at Eastfield, Councillor Hallam advised that the budget is available to replace it.
- The Committee heard if a problem with specific park equipment was identified, Officers would liaise with the relevant Park Groups and Park Management Committees.

AGREED: That the information is noted.

8. PERFORMANCE MONITORING SCRUTINY:

Councillor Brandon Eldred, Cabinet Member for Finance and Ian Tyrer, Revenues Manger, LGSS, provided a briefing note regarding performance information regarding Council Tax arrears. The salient points were highlighted.

The Committee made comment, asked questions and heard:

- Council Tax arrears have gone up that demonstrates indebtedness. Longer term sustainable arrangements are in place. Customers are helped, looking at their debts to see which are priority debts. Customers also have the option to liaise with the Voluntary Sector.
- Officers aim to assess whether customers can't or won't pay the Council Tax arrears.
- Action is taken against customers regarding non-payment, for example, attachment of earnings, attachment of benefits, and the use of enforcement agencies.
- The maximum attachment of benefits is £3.70 per week. Officers aim to officer additional assistance before the option of attachment of benefits.
- No interest is charged on Council Tax arrears.

- A number of customers pay their Council Tax over a 12 month period; however, a large proportion still pay over ten months.
- In response to a query, the Committee heard that information regarding how Council Tax can be paid, such as over 10 or 12 months, is provided when the Council Tax bill for the year is issued.

AGREED: That the information is noted.

9. CABINET RESPONSE TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORT

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the Cabinet's response to the O&S Report: Pre-decision Scrutiny: Museum Trust.

It was AGREED that a follow up report would be requested to be presented to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27 March 2017.

10. SCRUTINY PANELS

11. SCRUTINY PANEL 1

Councillor Dennis Meredith, Chair, Scrutiny Panel 1, advised the Committee of the evidence that had been gathered so far, including witnesses evidence and various site visits.

The progress report for Scrutiny Panel 1 was noted.

12. SCRUTINY PANEL 3

Councillor Zoe Smith, Chair, Scrutiny Panel 3, advised the Committee of the evidence that had been gathered so far and the planned site visits that would take place in December 2016.

The progress report for Scrutiny Panel 3 was noted.

13. SCRUTINY PANEL 4

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee approved the scope of the Review – Emissions Strategy (Action Plan.)

14. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORTING AND MONITORING WORKING GROUP

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee approved the Terms of Reference for the Reporting and Monitoring Working Group 2016/2017.

15. REPORT BACK FROM NBC'S REPRESENTATIVE TO NCC'S HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The report back from NBC's representative to NCC's Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee was noted.

16. POTENTIAL FUTURE PRE DECISION SCRUTINY

The Committee suggested that the issue regarding sewers and sewage is referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programming Event in April 2017.

17. URGENT ITEMS

There were none.

The meeting concluded at 7:46pm