

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 11 November 2019

PRESENT: Councillor Lane (Chair); Councillor Walker (Deputy Chair); Councillors Ansell, Ashraf, Aziz, Duffy, McCutcheon (In place of G Eales), Meredith, Roberts, Russell and Sargeant

Councillor Jonathan Nunn, Leader of the Council
George Candler, Chief Executive
Marion Goodman, Head of Customer and Cultural Services
Tracy Tiff, Democratic and Member Services Manager
Craig Forsyth, Marketing and Communications Manager

PRESS: James Averill, Democracy Reporter

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Smith and G Eales.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2019 were signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

There were none.

5. NORTHAMPTON FORWARD

Councillor Jonathan Nunn, Leader of the Council, and George Candler, Chief Executive, addressed the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and provided an update on Northampton Forward.

Councillor Jonathan Nunn, Leader of the Council, apprised:

In relation to the Future High Street Fund, they had engaged with a number of experts, in particular an organisation that will put the bid together. Priorities had been established such as the Market Square and Drapery improvements. A business case will need to be created and further details provided for the final submission of the business case back to MHCLG at the end of April. Proper and thorough amendments were taking place on the priorities although in some instances it was difficult to assess the immediate commercial return. A process has commenced using the specialist knowledge of those on the Board e.g. reviewing University “declined places” to understand the reasons for this as well as how the success of the Market Square could impact on wider businesses and the University.

In relation to a redesigned Market Square, various options are being considered including fixed stalls as well as events. Trees have been suggested for inclusion and potential green space. In the masterplan consultation many consultees were keen on some form of water to be included. A stage area had also been suggested although that was less likely. A public

consultation will take place towards the end of 2019 on the proposals of the redesign of the market square.

An update was provided on the development of a Place marketing Strategy. –It is important to ensure the focus is correct initially and to produce strong messages of what Northampton is about. Funding would be used for this. The first stage is currently being commissioned to undertake the “discovery stage” while steps two and three would include designing and implementing the strategy and campaign. A member briefing will take place later this month (28 November) on the town centre masterplan.

The Committee asked questions, made comment and heard:

- Member briefing on the Master Plan is supported by committee members
- A beautiful water feature in Sheffield is a good example of a water feature. Councillor Jonathan Nunn advised of water features in Birmingham; water features would be investigated. Hydroponic technology was suggested
- Greyfriars Bus and Coach Interchange is a project that funding is being sought for
- Blue plaques are being investigated for the town
- Councillor Jamie Lane, Chair, suggested a need to review where the footfall counters are located however he is aware it would be difficult to relocate these as new baseline figures would be established making like for like comparisons difficult
- Four Waterside - preparing a masterplan with close liaison with the Environment Agency. Open public consultation is required
- Taking the emphasis off of retail for the town is key to its future success
- The Committee requested a written brief on Northampton Forward for future meetings
- It is important that Councillors are aware of the discovery costs of the Place Marketing Strategy (£20,000)
- It was queried whether historians are being consulted on the project; for example “pre-consultation to the consultation” In response, the Leader advised that it must be ensured that all are engaged in the consultation rather than just one group such as the historians. Councillor Emma Roberts suggested adding historians onto the Board
- The Foundation Stones Project was referred to
- There is a need to factor in maintenance costs when trees are planted
- The Committee suggested that there is a need to find provisions for the homeless

The Chair, thanked Councillor Nunn and George Candler for their updates and reminded the Committee that they could email the Leader with suggestions and ideas at any time.

AGREED: That a written brief on Northampton Forward is presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 20 February 2020.

6. FACILITIES FOR STUDENTS

Marion Goodman, Head of Customer and Cultural Services, highlighted the key points from the written brief and added that the museum will offer discounted rates for students and it has ensured that roles available at NBC are advertised at the university.

The Committee made comment, asked questions and heard:

- NBC works with The Lowdown and closely with Community Engagement as well as a number of partners
- It was queried whether a review of student accommodation was required; Councillor Jamie Lane advised that he would take this issue to the Work Programming event in

March 2020 for consideration

- There is partnership working with NLT (Northamptonshire Leisure Trust)
- NBC works closely with Health and therefore doesn't do anything specifically in relation to sexual health awareness for students
- Bulky waste charges have been reduced to £15 to encourage its use
- All landlords are being targeted regarding responsibilities in relation to flytipping

AGREED: That the update is noted.

7. SPORTS POLICY

Marion Goodman, Head of Customer and Cultural Services, advised that the work on the Sports Policy had been overtaken by Unitary, however, this would be looked at with Daventry District Council and South Northants Council regarding developing a strategy.

The Committee made comment, asked questions and heard:

It was commented that the update does not appear to detail much progression and whether there anything specific being done for a strategy? Marion Goodman, Head of Customer and Cultural Services, explained that not much had happened since the motion was carried at full Council but meetings had been held with other Sovereign Councils and NLT, but until the working group had Programme Managers in place, work could not fully commence.

It was requested that Councillor Phil Larratt, Deputy Leader, is asked to attend the next meeting and provide an update. Councillor Jamie Lane, Chair, advised that this can be reviewed when the motions list returns to Council.

AGREED: That Councillor Phil Larratt, Deputy Leader, is asked to attend January 2020 Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide an update on the Sports Policy.

8. PROMOTION OF INFORMATION

Craig Forsyth, Marketing and Communications Manager, presented the written brief and highlighted salient points of the different forms and types of communication and engagement.

The Committee made comment, asked questions and heard:

- In response to a query regarding webcasting, the Committee heard that this has been put to one side currently in the move to Unitary
- Direct mail consultation has not always been clear and concise, there is a need for wording in the consultation would be looked at
- It was queried how events that are NBC backed are promoted; Craig Forsyth, Marketing and Communications Manager, explained that the Communications team usually advise service areas of how they should consult regarding direct mail. Often the team has sight of communications before they are released. It was highlighted that the Parish and Community documentation was not clear as the context was difficult for many to grasp.
- If the Communications team are aware of an event that NBC is running they are always happy to promote this where possible.
- The Community Engagement team is utilised as they have a good network to connect with.

- It was advised that noticeboards around the town do on occasion advertise events that were out of date as they were not removed. There needs to be a programme of events advertised e.g. interactive board details what is going on within the town.

AGREED: That the information is noted.

9. STATUTORY GUIDANCE ON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY IN LOCAL AND COMBINED AUTHORITIES

Councillor Jamie Lane, Chair, presented the briefing note, highlighting how open and transparent Overview and Scrutiny is at Northampton Borough Council. He added that NBC's Scrutiny process "ticks the boxes" for most of the statutory guidelines. The Committee confirmed NBC's Scrutiny works very well and it should be a recommended model of Overview and Scrutiny to the Unitary authority.

Councillor Emma Roberts commented from a recent conference that it was apparent that NBC's Scrutiny is working well; pre-scrutiny could have more attention but the Working Groups work very well. Councillor Jamie Lane, Chair, added that some recommendations could be implemented quicker but Scrutiny is an evolving process. NBC Scrutiny is good due to lots of excellent Office support.

It was suggested that contact is made with Northamptonshire County Council to ascertain whether it has undertaken any work on the Statutory Guidance

AGREED: That a Working Group is set up to look at the Statutory Guidance against NBC's Overview and Scrutiny process to check how NBC's Scrutiny is working to the recommended guidance.

That membership of the Working Group consists of Councillor Lane (Chair) Councillors Ashraf, Aziz, Duffy and Roberts

10. MONITORING OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORTS

10.A. CULTURE AND TOURISM

Marion Goodman, Head of Customer and Cultural Services, presented the action plan detailing progress on the accepted recommendations. She highlighted:

- A working group will be set up to look at blue plaques
- The "app": will be ready by the end of the year
- The Town Centre Manager asked Aldermen if they are interested in the Green badge qualification but to date had not received much support
- The shoes were unfortunately vandalised
- It was suggested that the Trail app: should include what is going on in the town too; This app had evolved from the ghost walks app
- Scope for the tourism executive is good news

AGREED: That further monitoring takes place at the January 2020 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Leader of the Council will be invited to attend for consideration of this item.

10.B. CEMETERIES

Marion Goodman, Head of Customer and Cultural Services, presented the action plan and

highlighted:

- In response to a query it was confirmed that the building of the crematorium is still under review and if progressed further it would be by the Unitary Authority
- A working party is looking at cemetery space provision and working with colleagues in Planning. The provision is for 6 years, possibly up to 10 years
- Signage has been paused due to Unitary
- There has been no short term interest to purchase land adjacent to Kingsthorpe Cemetery but it could be an option for longer term

AGREED: That further monitoring takes place at the February 2020 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

11. SCRUTINY PANELS

11.A. SCRUTINY PANEL 1

It was highlighted that anonymised case studies with regards to food poverty in schools would be provided.

AGREED: That the update is noted.

11.B. O&S WORKING GROUP - GANGS AND KNIFE CRIME

AGREED: That the written update is noted.

12. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORTING AND MONITORING WORKING GROUP

The terms of reference for the Overview and Scrutiny Reporting and Monitoring Working Group were approved.

13. TREE POLICY

Councillor Jamie Lane, Chair, advised that he has been asked to consider setting up a Working Group to look at the Tree Policy as there had been complaints about maintenance. It was confirmed that the Working Group must be in respect of the current Tree Policy. Expert advisors are required to provide evidence.

The Committee reported problems that trees can cause in properties.

AGREED: That a Working Group is to be set up to initially review the current Tree Policy maintenance programme.

That Membership of the working group consists:

Chair: Councillor Dennis Meredith

Deputy Chair: Councillor Janice Duffy

The Democratic and Member Services Manager, on behalf of the Chair would email the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to source additional members.

14. POTENTIAL FUTURE PRE DECISION SCRUTINY.

There were none.

15. URGENT ITEMS

There were none.

The meeting concluded at 8:20 pm