

COUNCIL MEETING – 14 JANUARY 2014

REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

9 December 2013

Present: Councillors Morrall (Chairman), B Patel (Vice-Chairman), Ainge, Emerson, Higgins, M Patel, Raymond, Simmons, V Waters and Watts.

Also present: Mr S Wood, Head of Planning and Local Development, Mrs V Jessop, Principal Housing Manager, Mrs P McCourt, Senior Housing Officer, Mrs A Piatek-Bednarek, Energy Efficiency and Carbon Reduction Officer, Mr J Casserly, Managing Director Wellingborough NORSE and Mr A Barron, Democratic Services Officer.

(Councillors Elliott and Scarborough attended as observers).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED to note that apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carr and L Lawman.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED to note that in accordance with the Localism Act 2011, the council's code of conduct and the council's constitution, the under-mentioned councillors declared an interest in the following items:

Councillor	Minute No	Subject	Reason
Higgins	4	Housing Plan 2013-2018 – Monitoring and Progress Report	Registerable – Council appointed board member of Wellingborough Homes
Higgins	6	Energy Company Obligation – Insulation Programme	Other – Resides in a solid wall house
Higgins	7	Housing Allocation Policy	Registerable – Council appointed board member of Wellingborough Homes
M Patel	6	Energy Company Obligation – Insulation Programme	Registerable – Family members reside in four solid wall properties within Castle ward
Simmons	6	Energy Company Obligation – Insulation Programme	Registerable – Owns one such property in Wollaston

3. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 28 October 2013 be confirmed and signed.

4. HOUSING PLAN 2013-2018 – MONITORING AND PROGRESS REPORT

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Planning and Local Development was received to provide members with a monitoring and progress report on the delivery of the 2013-2018 Housing Plan.

The Principal Housing Manager outlined the good level of progress achieved in a number of areas and explained that the low cost ownership action would be improved once the East Midlands Homebuy schemes had been uploaded to the Keyways system.

Members enquired about the lack of registered providers within the borough signing the pre-eviction protocol, but welcomed the response that the service plans to progress the action within the first half of next year and that any difficulties would be fed back to members.

Members' Briefing Notes were requested, and fully supported by the committee, in order to highlight significant points of interest throughout the year, alongside the annual end of year report to the committee.

RESOLVED to note the annual review of the Housing Plan 2013-2018.

5. LOCAL WELFARE SUPPORT

The joint report of the Head of Finance and the Head of Planning and Local Development was received to advise members of the response taken by the council to the changes introduced by the Welfare Reform Act 2012.

The Principal Housing Manager outlined some of the measures taken to mitigate the negative impacts of the Act. In order to plan the best possible response, members heard that information had been taken from welfare agencies, such as the FISH shop, which has recently experienced an increase in enquiries in particular in relation to housing benefit. Members welcomed the use of numerous computers in Tithe Barn offices that will help residents with the introduction of Universal Credit in Wellingborough, although the start date has yet to be confirmed.

Members also heard that the borough does not have an adequate supply of one and two bedroom homes, although this was being addressed through Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act agreements as part of planning consents, which would better suit the needs of the local population.

Members had concern that the implementation of Universal Credit would result in difficulties for the residents of the borough. The committee were, however, assured that officers would intervene at the earliest possible stage before any individual circumstances got out of control. The intention once the total implications of the scheme were known is to include peripatetic support within the community. This was further commented on and members heard of the importance in working in partnership with voluntary sector organisations in delivering an effective response to the changes. Members enquired about

discretionary housing payments and were assured that the 2013-2014 budget still had the capacity to deal with the anticipated number of applications up to the end of the fiscal year.

The Principal Housing Manager informed the committee that she was maintaining a watching brief on the Universal Credit pilot schemes being trialled in other parts of the country. This would inform the preparation of a strategy to outline the council's approach going forward. Members noted that future reports would be presented to the committee as further details emerged.

Members raised the issue of resources regarding the changes. The Head of Planning and Local Development addressed the committee at this stage and outlined the importance of strengthening the partnership work that was already in place. Members heard that resources would always be a challenge to predict but by ensuring that facilities were available for those that can self serve, would allow the remaining resources to be focused on the most vulnerable in the community.

RESOLVED to note the response to the changes introduced by the Welfare Reform Act 2012.

(Councillor Watts voted against this item).

(Councillor Scarborough left the meeting).

6. ENERGY COMPANY OBLIGATION – INSULATION PROGRAMME

The annexed report of the Head of Planning and Local Development was received to advise members of a partnership with Yorkshire Energy Partnership (YEP) and Cosyseal Group to offer residents in the borough energy efficiency measures.

The Principal Housing Manager reminded the committee of the Council's obligations under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1985 to reduce harmful CO₂ emissions and the number of households in fuel poverty.

The report informed the committee of a new scheme to retro fit insulation to the solid walls of properties in the borough. Members were informed that the proposed programme would not have any financial implications for the council or the householders taking advantage of the scheme. Cosyseal, the company proposing the scheme for the borough was taking advantage of the Energy Company Obligations (ECO). ECO is focused on low income and vulnerable households helping them to heat homes to a healthy level and financed by UK energy suppliers.

The council would lead the initiative and work with Yorkshire Energy Partnership and their contractor Cosyseal to offer residents in Castle Ward the opportunity to take advantage of the scheme. The Energy Efficiency and Carbon Reduction Officer outlined the approach being taken in relation to the awareness campaign that would be undertaken to promote the scheme.

Members were in full agreement of the importance in agreeing to this partnership and had no hesitation in approving the action. The Chairman suggested to the Principal Housing Manager that awareness of the programme should be added to the next Landlords' Forum agenda.

RESOLVED to enter into a service level agreement with Cosyseal Ltd to offer residents in the Borough free solid wall insulations and energy efficiency measures.

7. HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY

The annexed report of the Head of Planning and Local Development was received to propose to members amendments to the Housing Allocation Policy following its implementation in April 2013.

The Senior Housing Officer outlined to members that the changes were largely further clarifications and additions in order to ensure that the Policy was understood and as transparent as possible to users of the scheme.

The committee sought further clarification about the speed of processing applications, the definition of anti-social behaviour, the allocation of tenancies in the villages and suggested a number of minor amendments in relation to debt amounts to improve the clarity of the policy.

RESOLVED to approve the amendments to the Housing Allocations Policy with effect from 1 January 2014.

(Councillor Elliott left the meeting).

8. UPDATE ON PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS: WELLINGBOROUGH NORSE

The annexed report of the Managing Director of Wellingborough NORSE was received to provide members with the latest quarterly update on the performance of Wellingborough NORSE between July and September 2013.

The Managing Director of Wellingborough NORSE informed members of the strategic action plan and operational update that provides the residents of Wellingborough with information about the priorities and performance of the company.

Members welcomed the news that Wellingborough NORSE were on course to achieving their financial targets.

Members enquired about the recent litter experiment, supported by Tidy Britain. The Managing Director informed members of the positive media exposure generated by the initiative. He committed to providing a detailed analysis of the impact of the scheme.

The Managing Director also informed the committee of a series of newspaper, television and radio links that would be e-mailed to members after the meeting.

The articles highlighted the positive work being undertaken by Wellingborough NORSE on a daily basis, but importantly the high profile exposure the articles gave both the Council and NORSE.

RESOLVED to note the content of the quarterly report.

Chairman

The meeting concluded at 8.20pm.

COUNCIL MEETING – 14 JANUARY 2014
REPORT OF THE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

10 December 2013

Present: Councillors Allebone (Chairman), Waters (Vice-Chairman), Bass, Blackwell, Elliott, Gough, Graves, Hawkes, Higgins, Warwick and Watts.

Also present: Mr S Wood, Head of Planning and Local Development, Mrs S Bateman, Senior Planning Officer, Mr A Munro, Neighbourhood Planning Officer, Mrs N Mackenzie, Economic Regeneration Officer and Mrs C A Mundy, Democratic Services Officer.

(Councillors Bell and G Lawman attended the meeting as observers.)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED to note that an apology for absence was received from Councillor L Lawman.

2. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 October 2013 be confirmed and signed.

3. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY UPDATE

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Planning and Local Development was received on the Economic Development activity and to provide members of the committee with the opportunity to influence priorities for the unit.

The report provided information, at Appendix 1, on the latest quarterly activity update for the period September to December 2013 and detailed projects that were due to take place between December and March 2014.

The Economic Development Framework highlighted the original four priorities of creating a vibrant town centre, tourism, improving the conditions of growth and increasing skills. In 2011 the BID had been established and this was the lead partner for town centre related activity. Council resources were therefore concentrated on improving conditions of growth and increasing skills and attainment.

The report also detailed information on how to apply for the £10,000, received by Wellingborough's Town Team from the government, to fund projects to enhance the town centre.

The report concluded with the economic development strategy implementation plan for 2013-14 which detailed the work that would be taking place.

Members raised a number of questions regarding the standards of education in the borough, asking whether GCSE results had improved, and on a perceived feeling that young peoples' aspirations had not improved, and asked whether there had been an improvement.

Mrs N Mackenzie, the Economic Regeneration Officer, informed the committee that she did not have figures in relation to the comparison of GCSE results but would obtain them for the next quarterly report. She sat on the local Young Enterprise board which encourages business to support groups of students to form and run their own company for a year.

Mr S Wood, the Head of Planning and Local Development, confirmed that education was one of the main objectives, and fostering better aspirations and ambitions was a high priority. Working with teachers to get them to encourage young people to consider different types of work in the area was the ambition.

A query was also raised about the difference between Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the work of the Northamptonshire Enterprise Partnership (NEP). The Economic Regeneration officer clarified that NEP was one of the 39 LEPs across the country; they were very active in the borough and were busy with the Northamptonshire growth and business plan, which future Government funding and support would be based on. The plan would need to be submitted to government by 19 December 2013.

Members asked if officers could explain the talent match programme for January 2019. The Economic Regeneration officer informed the meeting that this was an initiative being led by the HOPE centre - and an announcement of the result of their funding application for this project was awaited. The intention is that the scheme would assist 18 to 24 year olds, who had been unemployed for 2 years or more, in the Hemmingwell and Queensway areas to find employment. The committee would be informed once the result of the funding application is known.

With regard to an improved visitor economy, members asked if there had been any developments with regard to a proposed marina by Whitworths and whether anything had been submitted to 'Destination Nene Valley'. The Head of Planning and Local Development clarified that there had been input to the 'Destination Nene Valley' project but there was no further information on the marina.

RESOLVED to:

- (i) note the economic development activity quarterly report;
- (ii) approve the economic development framework and the priorities highlighted as a basis of activity going forward;
- (iii) approve the town team funding application form;
- (iv) approve the updated economic development action plan and the priorities highlighted within it as a basis of activity going forward.

4. ADOPTION OF STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Planning and Local Development was received in response to the consultation on, and adoption of, the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) for North Northamptonshire. Consultation had taken place for a period of 8 weeks from 16 August to 11 October 2013. The report detailed the consultation responses received from 21 respondents.

The North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit had produced the new Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) on behalf of the partner authorities and had adopted it on 14 November 2013, with a recommendation that partner authorities also adopt it in relation to their responsibilities.

It was hoped that the streamlined version of the SCI would make it easier to use and allow local planning authorities to undertake consultation on other documents, such as supplementary planning documents in accordance with national regulations. Appended to the report was the SCI document along with a suggested amendment, as detailed within the report, to paragraph 5.12.

Members asked for clarity on 'light touch engagement' and what difference there would be if applicants failed to carry out a 'statement of local engagement'.

Mrs S Bateman, the Senior Planning Officer, clarified that an applicant could not be forced to consult and produce a statement of local engagement but would be *encouraged* to do so. The government was keen to withdraw obstacles from developments taking place.

Members also asked if employment land should remain as employment land where possible, rather than being used for residential development. The Senior Planning Officer clarified that the SCI only dealt with how people would be consulted on plans and planning applications and not the relative merits of proposals.

R1 RECOMMENDED that the Statement of Community Involvement be adopted, subject to the amendment to paragraph 5.12, as detailed in the report.

5. NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Planning and Local Development was received to update the committee on the Neighbourhood Plans currently being undertaken.

The report detailed the support and resources that the Planning Policy & Regeneration Team had put into helping each of the parish councils involved in preparing a neighbourhood plan.

Mr A Munro, Neighbourhood Planning Officer, updated members on the progress of the Earls Barton, Wollaston and Irchester plans. The plans were

proportionately more arduous to produce than local plans because of the amount of community involvement that was required. All were progressing slowly as a result. Earls Barton had submitted a draft of their plan for comment by the borough council planning officers. Referendum dates had been proposed for August 2014 for Earls Barton, March 2015 for Irchester and June 2015 for Wollaston.

Members raised some concern over the length of time it was taking for the neighbourhood plans to be completed, as planning applications for large developments were being proposed which would be heard before the plans were in place. The Neighbourhood Planning Officer informed the committee that the Planning Inspectorate had indicated that emerging plans were not taken into consideration when determining applications. Concern was also expressed over the delay in developing Stanton Cross and Wellingborough North and the lack of a 5 year deliverable housing supply. Members considered that strong representations should be made to the government regarding the use and importance that should be given to emerging Neighbourhood Plans.

RESOLVED that the update on the progress being made on Neighbourhood Plans, along with the resources allocated to them, be noted.

6. OFF-STREET PARKING ORDER AMENDMENT – MARKET PLACE

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Planning and Local Development was received on the recent consultation in relation to a proposed amendment to the off-street parking order.

A public notice advertising the consultation on the Off-Street Parking Amendment Order had been placed in the Northants Telegraph on 10 October 2013 and letters had been sent to statutory consultees, market traders and surrounding businesses. The report detailed the comments received, along with the response of the Market Working Group.

The Head of Planning and Local Development informed the committee that following the concern of traders about the parking of their trailers, consideration was being given to whether a lock-up compound could be provided within the High Street car park.

RESOLVED that the off-street parking order amendment be approved and implemented.

- In concluding the meeting, the Chairman wished everyone a merry Christmas and a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year.

Chairman

The meeting concluded at 8.10pm.

COUNCIL MEETING – 14 JANUARY 2014
REPORT OF THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

11 December 2013

Present: Councillors Bell (Chairman), Hollyman (.Vice-Chairman), Allebone, Bailey, Dholakia, Graves, Henley, Morrall, Partridge-Underwood, B Patel, Scarborough, Ward and Waters.

Also present: Mr J T Campbell, Chief Executive, Mrs L Elliott, Head of Finance, Mrs B Lawrence, Head of Resources, Mr S Wood, Head of Planning and Local Development, Mrs S Knowles, Principal Accountancy Manager, Mr N Robinson, Principal Revenue and Benefits Manager and Mrs C A Mundy, Democratic Services Officer.

(Councillors Elliott and Emerson also attended as observers.)

2. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2013 be confirmed and signed.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED to note that in accordance with the Localism Act 2011, the council's code of conduct and the council's constitution, the under-mentioned councillor declared an interest in the following items:

Councillor	Minute No	Subject	Reason
Bell	12	The W3 bus service	Other interest – knows a number of users of the service.

4. WELLINGBOROUGH LOCAL PLAN

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Planning and Local Development was received on the resources required to prepare an up to date Local Plan for the borough.

The Development Committee of 23 October 2012 resolved that a borough wide Local Plan should be prepared, and that a review of the Town Centre Area Action Plan (TCAAP) also needed to be undertaken. To do this additional staff resources were required to ensure that the review process would take place within a reasonable timescale and that the evidence base was up to date.

The report detailed the staffing level prior to the restructure in 2011 and the current levels, and detailed the functions that the service in general provided.

A broad outline of the stages of the plan preparation was appended to the report. The timetable was dependent on resources being available to bring the plan forward to the 'Examination in Public' (EiP) stage. The report also detailed the time it had taken to produce the TCAAP and the resources that had been put into achieving it.

The full financial implications were detailed in the report and included two additional Planning Officers, additional time for the Planning Policy and Regeneration Manager, employment of a specialist consultant along with the costs of a public consultation. It was believed that this would be in the region of £536,000, which once the current level of reserves had been used would equate to the sum of £330,200 being required to complete the plan.

The Local Plan would need to be adopted and would act as a defence of decisions made by the Planning Committee which would be based on more robust policies and be more likely to be successfully defended, reducing the cost of appeals.

Members expressed concern over the additional funding that was required for the provision of a Local Plan and particularly over why this had not been included in the medium term financial plan. They also asked why, following the decision of the Development Committee in 2012, it had taken so long for any action to be taken on the development of the plan, and for the request for additional funding to come forward. Members also asked what the average number of staff dealing with this type of work was in other authorities and whether an alternative option would be to use consultants. If the additional funding was agreed, members asked how long it would be before another plan was required.

The Principal Planning and Regeneration Manager responded to the queries explaining that since the decision of the Development Committee, work had commenced on evidence gathering. Consultancy work had been undertaken for the preparation of the town centre health check and this had been paid for from funds already available in budget.

The need for the additional staffing resource was to progress the plan to ensure that the evidence gathering was timely for the examination in public.

Staffing levels at other councils in the county varied between five and eight per team. Consultancy work had been considered but it was thought that this would be better carried out 'in house'. The plan, when completed, would be used for a ten year period, although there would be partial reviews during this time.

RESOLVED that approval be given to the use of £214,000 of current reserves in 2014-15, and to include the additional resources of £330,000 needed in 2015-16 and 2016-17 in the medium term financial plan.

5. REVENUE MONITORING FOR THE PERIOD 1 APRIL 2013 TO 31 OCTOBER 2013

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Finance was received on the forecast of the year end revenue budget position for 2013-14 based on the latest financial information available at 31 October 2013 (Period 7).

The monitoring statement showed an additional use of reserves at the end of 2013-14 of £90,000 (0.87% of net budget). This represented a downturn of £26,000 on the previous forecast additional use of reserves of £64,000, which had been reported to the committee on 18 September 2013. The main reasons for the movement were detailed within the report and a summary of budget monitoring at 31 October was appended to the report.

Members queried the Communities for Health Post and asked for an explanation of the role. The Head of Planning and Local Development confirmed that he would send a members briefing note detailing this.

RESOLVED that the projected outturn and explanations for the forecast variations at 31 March 2014 be noted.

6. CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Finance was received on the capital programme monitoring information to 31 October 2013.

The total capital budget for 2013-14 was £6,669,000. Appended to the report was a full assessment of the capital monitoring. This gave the current position, profiling information and outturn estimates. The report also detailed the movements that had taken place in 2013-14.

The report detailed the current position for approved schemes along with up-to-date profiling information and outturn estimates.

A request had been made for a virement of budget between capital schemes in order to complete the compulsory purchase of 66-74 Lea Way within this financial year and details were set out in appendix 2 of the report.

Members asked questions, for the purpose of clarity, regarding the budget for the Lea Way compulsory purchase, which was confirmed to be £547,580 in total.

There was also a question over whether monies would be spent before the end of the financial year. The Principal Accountancy Manager informed members that the information contained in the report had been provided by each project officer, and she believed that £500,000 would be spent within the next week. The Head of Finance clarified that she was reliant on the information provided by the project manager to ensure accurate profiling.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the projected outturn and anticipated variances as at 31 October 2013 as detailed in the report be noted;
- (ii) approval be given to the variations as detailed in the report;
- (iii) the external funding as detailed in the report be noted.

7. LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2014-15

The annexed circulated report of the Principal Revenue and Benefits Manager was received on the Local Council Tax Support scheme (CTS) for 2014-15 and subsequent years.

The Resources Committee on 18 September 2013 agreed that a consultation be undertaken on the three options for the scheme. Full details and illustrations of how each option would affect an average couple were given in the report.

A public consultation exercise began on 1 October and ended on 26 November. The results showed that the majority of respondents supported a scheme whereby at least 20% of the council tax would be payable. Full details were appended to the report.

Based on the evidence and advice of officers the recommendation was for option 2 to be selected. This would mean that the maximum percentage of working age claimants council tax liability that could be met under the borough council's CTS scheme for 2014/15 would be set at 80%, leaving 20% to be paid. It was considered that this option should mitigate the financial pressures on the revenue budget.

The Head of Finance advised members that any decision would also impact on the Police Authority and Northamptonshire County Council.

Members asked questions about each of the options, particularly querying why option 1 was not being recommended.

The Principal Revenue and Benefits Manager explained that option 1 presented a higher risk with regard to the impact on the collection rate and as such it was considered more financially prudent to go with option 2.

Members asked if they could have 'actual' figures so they could further understand the implications for each option.

The Head of Finance informed the meeting that she was not expecting to receive the financial settlement until 19 December so it was difficult to provide exact figures. She estimated that should option 3 be chosen the cost to the council would be in the region of between £13,000 to £20,000.

A question was asked about what other councils were doing across the county.

The Principal Revenue and Benefits Managers responded to say that each council was in a different financial situation so it was difficult to compare.

The Head of Finance would issue a members briefing note, once confirmation of the financial settlement was received and prior to the Council Meeting on 14 January 2014.

Councillor Scarborough moved an amendment which was seconded by Councillor Dholakia as follows:

The committee is invited to recommend to adopt option 3 as outlined in section 6.1 of the report.

On being put to the vote the amendment was declared lost.

(Councillors Dholakia, Henley and Scarborough asked that their vote in favour of the amendment be recorded.)

R1 RECOMMENDED that option 2, as detailed in the report, be adopted.

(Members commended the report and thanked officers for an excellent paper.)

8. CALCULATION OF THE COUNCIL TAX BASE 2014-15

The annexed circulated report of the Principal Revenue and Benefits Manager was received to approve the council tax base for 2014-15.

The report detailed how the council tax base had been calculated by taking into account the present occupancy situation, new dwellings becoming chargeable, the ratio of the bands to band D, the estimated collection rates, local council tax discounts and the local council tax support scheme.

The council tax, tax base calculation, would enable precepting authorities to determine their financial requirements for the coming year.

A member asked for clarification over whether the financial assistance given to parish councils by the council last year would be repeated in the coming year. The Head of Finance clarified that the funding had been for one year only and had not been factored into the medium term financial plan.

R2 RECOMMENDED that:

- (i) the amount calculated by the Borough Council of Wellingborough as the council tax base for the year 2014-15 be 21,834 (Band D equivalents);
- (ii) the council tax bases for the parish councils and Wellingborough town be approved.

9. DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET 2014-15 AND THE MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN PROJECTIONS

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Finance was received to provide members with details of the medium term financial plan projections for revenue spending and to outline more details of the 2014-15 draft revenue budget for consultation.

The report also outlined the progress made on identifying proposals to match spending to available resources, and the potential use of reserves whilst proposals were being developed and fully implemented.

The projections included assumptions made on the levels of council tax and government funding, which would be updated and amended prior to formal agreement in February 2014.

The report summarised the huge financial challenges the council faced in matching its current spending levels with the levels of future forecasts for funding. A saving of approximately £1.7m was required in 2014-15 to give a fully balanced position. Significant efficiencies had already been made in previous years which made finding these savings even harder.

The initial budget assumption for 2014-15 had been to roll forward current budgets and to adjust for any known savings proposals as and when they arise. The Council would continue to need reserves to fund its revenue budget whilst more robust and deliverable solutions are developed.

The report detailed the council's priorities for 2014-15 which were set in the Corporate Plan 2011-14, the medium term financial outlook, the council's approach to the budget pressures for 2014-15 and the medium term, and the consultation process.

Also appended to the report was a draft fees and charges schedule.

A member asked for clarification on the amount of increase that was proposed for the fees and charges. The Head of Finance clarified that this was 2.5%.

A further question was asked regarding the future of Glamis Hall. Members were aware that there were alternative potential uses, and users, for the site which needed further discussion.

The Chief Executive clarified that he had recently had a meeting with Northamptonshire County Council and changes were taking place over how care was provided. He would be arranging a meeting of the working party for early in the new year and would notify members of the date in due course.

Members also asked a number of questions regarding pensions, over when the next re-evaluation of the pensions would be, the fact that assets were

increasing and that liabilities were also increasing, and how much the council contributed.

The Head of Finance responded and informed the committee that the re-evaluation would take place in April 2014. The council made a contribution of 13.9% plus a further 2% of pay base for previous liabilities.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the indicative level of council tax increase to be included in the budget assumptions as part of the consultation be agreed, after considering the S151 officer's advice in the report;
- (ii) the use of reserves to support the revenue budget over the short to medium term to allow for more robust service delivery options to be developed and implemented be agreed;
- (iii) the proposed draft fees and charges schedule be included in the information for consultation;
- (iv) the draft 2014-15 revenue budget, including the initial proposed savings suggestions, be included in the consultation;
- (v) the consultation method, as proposed, be agreed.

10. DRAFT CAPITAL PROGRAMME MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Finance was received on the capital financing available to the council for the medium term together with a list of potential capital schemes.

The report detailed the funding for the capital programme which was based on the assumption that at any one time a balance of £5million in its capital resources would be available for future years.

Appended to the report was a summary of capital resources, a list of capital schemes and the current capital strategy.

The report detailed the scoring of each scheme and how they were prioritised.

A question was asked as to whether any of the capital schemes would result in a revenue gain.

The Head of Finance clarified that some of the schemes, such as the CPO fund, would result in capital receipt.

Members commented generally on the priority of some of the schemes. The Head of Finance clarified that the ordering could be revisited and she would take comments on board.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) approval be given to the list of capital schemes to progress to the next stage of prioritisation, when resources are available;
- (ii) approval be given to officers to re-profile schemes in line with available resources.

11. IRRECOVERABLE COUNCIL TAX, NON-DOMESTIC RATES, SUNDRY DEBTS AND HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENTS

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Finance was received to request approval for the write-off of irrecoverable non domestic rates, council tax and housing benefit overpayments and to note amounts written off under delegated powers.

The appendices gave the detail of the irrecoverable sums and reasons why they had not been recovered.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the write off of £75,392.11 irrecoverable council tax, non-domestic rates and housing benefit overpayments be noted;
- (ii) it be noted that the amount of £41,933.23 has been written off under the delegated powers of the Section 151 officer.

(Councillor Bell left the meeting, having declared an interest, and Councillor Hollyman acted as Chairman for the next item.)

12. W3 BUS SERVICE

The annexed circulated report of the Chief Executive was received to provide an update on the financial support given by the council for the W3 bus service.

In September 2012 grant aid had been given to the W3 bus route to ensure a continuing service during “off peak” hours. Funding was authorised for a period of 12 months to a maximum of £47,750. In October 2013, this was extended for a further three months until 11 January 2014.

Discussions have been held with the bus company who have confirmed that the off peak services, and possibly the whole service, is not commercially viable without financial support. The council’s financial position is such that it can no longer continue to give grant funding. Notice was given on 16 November 2013 and funding will cease on 11 January 2014.

The county council is exploring alternative options for the service and the Chief Executive will continue to liaise with county council colleagues.

A member asked if figures were available giving the actual cost of each journey per person, to ascertain whether the grant funding had been well spent.

The Chief Executive responded that for information purposes the data collected indicated that at particular times on some days the service had been well used, on other days the usage was not so good. The bus company considered that it was not a commercially viable service.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the grant funding to support the W3 bus service will cease with effect from 11 January 2014;
- (ii) it be noted that the Chief Executive will continue to discuss alternative arrangements with county council colleagues on the basis that there is no cost to the borough council.

(Councillor Bell returned to the meeting.)

13. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item in accordance with Section 100A(4) to the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that they would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information of the descriptions shown in schedule 12A to the Act:

Min. no.	Item	Paragraph of Schedule 12A
14	Exempt appendices - Irrecoverable Council Tax, Non-Domestic Rates, Sundry Debts and Housing Benefit Overpayments	E3
15	Discretionary rate relief – Phoenix Resource Centre (Northampton) Limited	E3

14. IRRECOVERABLE COUNCIL TAX, NON-DOMESTIC RATES, SUNDRY AND HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENTS

The exempt circulated appendices were received.

RESOLVED that the exempt appendices be noted.

15. DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF – PHOENIX RESOURCE CENTRE (NORTHAMPTON) LIMITED

The annexed circulated exempt report of the Head of Finance was received on an application for discretionary rate relief from the Phoenix Resource Centre (Northampton) Limited.

The borough council had the discretionary power to grant relief to non-profit making organisations providing they satisfied specified criteria.

The report detailed the amount of non-domestic rates payable on the warehouse and detailed the work of the organisation. Details of the financial implications of awarding the discretionary relief were also given in the report.

RESOLVED that discretionary rate relief not be awarded to the Phoenix Resource Centre (Northampton) Limited, 28 Vaux Road, Finedon Road Industrial Estate, Wellingborough, NN8 4TG.

Chairman.....

The meeting concluded at 8.50pm.

COUNCIL MEETING – 14 JANUARY 2014

REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 December 2013

Present: Councillor Pursglove (Chairman), Councillors Carr (Vice Chairman), Elliott, Emerson, Gough, Hawkes, G Lawman, M Patel, Simmons, and V Waters.

Also present: Mrs B Lawrence (Head of Resources), Mr N Robinson (Principal Revenue and Benefits Manager), and Mrs P Whitworth (Democratic Services Officer).

(Councillor Bell attended as an observer.)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED to note that apologies for absence were received from Councillors Maguire and Timms.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor	Minute number	Subject	Reason
Simmons.	5.	Presentation – Central and East Northamptonshire Citizens Advice Bureau.	Other interest – council's representative on the board of the Citizens Advice Bureau.

3. **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2013 be confirmed and signed.

4. PRESENTATION – HOPE PROJECT

The chairman welcomed Simon Trundle, chief executive of the Hope Project, and invited him to begin his presentation.

Mr Trundle began by explaining the history of the Hope Project, which had its origins in the New Life Church on the Hemmingwell Estate, and was founded in 1997. He explained the aims of the project were:

- To serve families and individuals living on the Hemmingwell estate.
- To work in partnership with agencies to deliver critical support services to families, young people and individuals in a deprived community.
- To develop community training programmes to improve stability in families and improved employment opportunities.

He then went on to detail a number of services the project delivered to the community, which included:

- A family support service.
- Cygnets pre-school.
- A community café.
- Youth drop-in centre.

- Adult learning centre.
- Hobby groups.
- Music studio.

Mr Trundle showed members of the committee a number of photographs to illustrate the transformation of two buildings used by the project. The first showed the former Swallow Pub, which was derelict and had a history of criminal activity, and now housed the modern community café, pre-school, adult and youth training facilities, drop-in centre, a community meeting room and administration offices.

He explained that the transformation project cost £320,000, including £150,000 to purchase the lease, and that funding had come from the borough council, the county council, the East Midlands Development Agency, the lottery, and £112,000 from the New Life Church Trust. The building was renamed The Well and opened in June 2007.

The second project was the redevelopment of the estate's run-down community centre, which had suffered from vandalism and was underused. It was now a multi-purpose facility, offering skills training and a community hall. Mr Trundle explained that the centre could now import basic skills training to allow people to take the first steps on the road to further training and employment.

He detailed the costs of the community centre conversion, which totalled £326,000, and the annual running costs, which were £68,000. He explained that income from the centre was £44,000, and that even with a grant from the borough council of £12,000, the centre ran at a loss of £12,000 a year. This shortfall was currently being met by the project's reserves and fundraising.

Mr Trundle concluded his presentation by describing the results of the project in the sixteen years it had been running, and explaining some of the risks faced in the future. The results included:

- An increase in community pride.
- Adults and young people accessing training on their doorstep.
- Community ownership of the project.
- Footfall of 25,000.
- 386 individuals supported in 2013.

The risks included:

- Withdrawal of funding, which would lead to the closure of the community and skills centre.
- Increasing needs and demand.
- Staying focussed on the original vision of serving the Hemmingwell estate.
- Needing to bring in new volunteers and a new chief executive as Mr Trundle was stepping down in the near future.

The chairman thanked Mr Trundle for his presentation. He said that he appreciated the personal effort Mr Trundle had made and that the results of

the project were a testament to his leadership. He wished him well in the future.

The chairman then invited members to ask questions.

Members asked about services for people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) and enquired about the lottery-funded Talent Match, which supports young people into work, and whether they operated from the Hope Project's premises or could be approached for a grant. Mr Trundle replied that they were in discussions with Talent Match but they funded new initiatives rather than established ones. He added that Apprentice Supermarket had begun work with local NEETs at the Hope Project.

Members also asked about the project's plans for the future and whether they were likely to expand or increase their income. Mr Trundle replied that they were looking to expand the pre-school, as demand was increasing and it was a source of income. He also mentioned that the project was trying to secure funding for a sports hall, which could be a further source of income.

Members reiterated the chairman's comments about the contribution and achievements of Mr Trundle and his team, and said that the work of the project had been fundamental in the reduction in crime and that people were now happy to be housed on the estate. They commented that it was important the impetus wasn't lost once Mr Trundle stepped down as chief executive. Mr Trundle confirmed that when the project started in 1997 there was no community engagement but now there was significant ownership of the work of the project and very little vandalism. He explained the project was actively looking for a replacement chief executive, and was hoping that the role would be taken on a volunteer basis to save salary costs.

The chairman thanked Mr Trundle for his presentation. Members asked that it be reflected in the minutes that the importance of the work of the Hope Project, and in particular the work they were doing with NEETs, be given consideration by the Resources Committee when allocating community grants.

RESOLVED that the presentation be noted.

5. PRESENTATION – CENTRAL AND EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU

The chairman welcomed Martin Lord, chief executive of the Central and East Northamptonshire Citizens Advice Bureau, and invited him to begin his presentation.

Mr Lord began by explaining that the Central and East Northamptonshire Citizens Advice Bureau had been formed by the merger of Northampton and District CAB and Nene Valley CAB.

He explained the aims of the organisation were to provide the advice people need for the problems they face, and to improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.

He also explained the principles of the organisation were that it was free, independent, confidential and impartial.

Mr Lord then shared some statistics regarding the types of issues that people approached the organisation with, showing that problems around benefits had increased over the past year. Other problem areas of debt, housing and employment had stayed at a similar level to the previous year. Demographic data was also shared with the committee, illustrating the gender, ethnic origin, age and disability of those that accessed the organisation's services.

Mr Lord explained that the organisation had 32 volunteers, four paid staff, and one manager, shared across the organisation's two sites. Back office administration services were also shared.

Mr Lord concluded his presentation with a brief run down of the organisation's principal funders, which included the borough council, the Legal Aid Agency, Macmillan, Advice Services Transition Fund, the Department for Energy and Climate Change, and the Department for Business Innovation and Skills. He also shared two case studies with the committee, to illustrate the type and amount of help the organisation offered to individuals.

The chairman thanked Mr Lord for his presentation and invited members to ask questions.

Members requested clarification around the role the organisation played in trading standards services. A member mentioned that when contacting trading standards at the county council, he was told that he needed to speak to the CAB.

Mr Lord explained that there was a difference between the national Citizens Advice Bureau and the local bureaux. The national organisation was a charity in its own right and provided the branding and name for the local bureaux, which were also individual charities. The national organisation was able to provide its own services and that included a consumer services contact centre, which provided general trading standards advice. Enforcement of trading standards would be the responsibility of the county council.

Members also asked about the accessibility of the organisation, as they had received comments it could be difficult to get an appointment. Mr Lord said that they had seen more clients in the last year than in previous years, which showed the service was more accessible, but he acknowledged there were still issues. He explained that 97% of the population know about the CAB and it was often the first port of call, meaning that they were hugely over subscribed. He said that the appointments tended to be booked no more than 2-3 weeks in advance.

Members then asked Mr Lord if clients were ever referred to the CAB directly from the council. Mr Lord replied that there was a mechanism for direct referrals, and they did receive some, but he would be happy to have more as a referral meant that the client's needs were already identified. He pointed out that councillors were also able to refer their constituents directly.

Members also asked what association and relationship the CAB had with Support Wellingborough. Mr Lord replied that they had a cordial relationship with Support Wellingborough, led by Wellingborough Homes, and that as Wellingborough Homes had a contractual relationship with Community Law Service they didn't refer to the CAB. He added that although there weren't direct referrals, he wouldn't know about whether or not Support Wellingborough signposted people to the CAB.

Members asked that the results of monitoring meetings with organisations in receipt of council funding be circulated to all members. The chairman confirmed that a members' briefing note would be circulated in due course.

RESOLVED that the presentation be noted.

6. COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS AND FREEDOM OF INFORMATION PERFORMANCE – 1 APRIL 2013 TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2013

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Resources was received to inform the committee of the council's performance, including Wellingborough Norse, during the first half of the year in handling customer feedback and requests for information. The report also included complaints that had been referred to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Appended to the report was detailed information on compliments, comments and complaints received by the council, as well as the numbers of Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulation requests received.

The report showed that for the period 1 April 2013 to 30 September 2013, a total of 29 compliments and 27 comments had been received.

During the same period, the council had received 45 complaints, of which 96% were responded to in full within 12 days. Of the 45 complaints received, 26 (58%) were not upheld whereas others involved lessons being learned and appropriate action taken.

For the same period in 2012-13, 82 complaints had been received, of which 95% were responded to within target. The report suggested reasons for the significant decrease between 2012-13 and 2013-14, which included the better weather during the summer compared to that of 2012 which particularly impacted on grounds maintenance and the level of complaints in relation to that. Other considerations included the fact that 2012 saw a number of national events celebrated locally, such as the Olympic Torch relay and Golden Jubilee, which in turn generated more customer feedback.

During the period covered by the report, the council received six cases from the Ombudsman. Two of those were premature complaints, whereby the Ombudsman considered the council had not been given reasonable opportunity to investigate and reply to the complainant. The remaining four were not investigated by the Ombudsman for the reasons set out in the report.

The report also detailed requests for information, and showed that during the first half of the year the council received 233 requests for information under

the Freedom of Information Act, 30 requests for information under Section 29 of the Data Protection Act, and 185 requests under the Environmental Information Regulations, making a total of 448. There was one Data Subject Access request. Of the 448 requests received, 443 (99%) were completed within the statutory 20 day working deadline.

For the same period in 2012-13, 359 requests for information had been received. The report explained that in response to the continuing increase in requests, officers were now beginning to publish information on the council's website, particularly where there are routine requests of the same or a similar nature.

The chairman commented that he was impressed with the content of the report, and in particular how few cases were referred to the Ombudsman, and asked that his comments be passed back to officers.

Members then raised the issue of complaints that had been received about personal paperwork going astray after being returned by the council, and asked how it was sent back. The Principal Revenue and Benefits Manager replied that personal paperwork needed for benefit claims was sent back by second class post, and not recorded delivery. He added that because there was a small risk that paperwork could go astray in the postal system, people were encouraged to drop paperwork off in person and wait for it to be copied and returned.

RESOLVED that report be noted.

7. REVIEW OF COUNCIL TAX AND HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENTS COLLECTION POLICY

The annexed circulated report of the Principal Revenue and Benefits Manager was received to inform members of the collection policy in relation to council tax, with regard to those in receipt of council tax support (CTS), and also collection of housing benefit overpayments.

The Principal Revenue and Benefits Manager explained that members had requested details of the revenue collection policy and the procedures in operation for the recovery of debt, including the policy for those in receipt of CTS, and the report was in response to that request.

Appended to the report were details of the council tax recovery policy, including the timings employed to full charge payers and alternative timings for CTS recipients paying 8.5% of their council tax charge for the first time, as well as details of the housing benefit recovery policy.

The report explained that the collection of council tax is a statutory service and the options available to the council for recovery are defined in regulation. The government had changed the way council tax benefit was funded in the 2012-13 financial year, which meant that for the first time working-age people previously in receipt of full council tax benefit were expected to contribute 8.5% towards their council tax charge.

The report went on to explain that council tax collection procedures were modified from April 2013 to allow for the extra financial pressure placed on these cases, and additional time was built into the recovery process to allow first time council tax payers to contact the council and understand the changes. The effect of this was that the majority of CTS cases to receive a summons were delayed until 24 October. On that date, 250 CTS cases received a summons, which equated to 6.87% of CTS cases, compared to 7.52% of non-CTS cases who also received a summons.

The report concluded by explaining that when CTS cases presented with particular financial pressures, the council tax team would advise them to seek debt advice and the report gave details of how this was provided.

Members asked about the recovery of money after a prosecution, as recovery was pursued in benefit fraud cases but not in non-payment of council tax cases. The Principal Revenue and Benefits Manager confirmed that it was covered by different legislation.

Members then raised the issue of bailiffs and asked how often they were used. The Principal Revenue and Benefits Manager said that the aim was always to seek a repayment arrangement, and before further recovery action could be taken a liability order would be applied for at a magistrates court authorising either the use of bailiffs, attachment of earnings, or attachment of benefits. He confirmed that that attachment of earnings or attachment of benefits was the preferred option as use of bailiffs incurred an additional cost. He also explained that he was not anticipating the use of bailiffs in CTS cases.

Members asked if reminders and summons were sent by recorded delivery, and the Principal Revenue and Benefits Manager confirmed that they were not required to do so. He said that evidence such as proof of posting was kept. Members queried if the same evidence was kept when sending back personal paperwork as mentioned when the previous report was discussed, and the Principal Revenue and Benefits Manager confirmed it was.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

The chairman wished all members of the committee a happy Christmas and all the best for 2014.

Chairman

The meeting closed at 8.30pm.

COUNCIL MEETING – 14 JANUARY 2014

REPORT OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE

17 December 2013

Present: Councillors Bailey (Chairman), Bass (Vice-Chairman), Bell, Dholakia, Harrington and Henley (6).

Also present: Mrs L Elliott (Head of Finance), Mr M Watkins (Chief Internal Auditor, CW Audit Services) and Miss E Davidson (Democratic Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED to note that an apology for absence was received from Councillor Simmons (1).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED to note there were no declarations of interest received in respect of the agenda items specified in accordance with the code of conduct.

3. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2013 be confirmed and signed.

4. CHIEF INTERNAL AUDITOR'S UPDATE REPORT 2013-14

The annexed circulated report of the Chief Internal Auditor was received on the performance of the internal audit service against its agreed scope of work.

The Chief Internal Auditor highlighted that 139 of the 232 planned days of work had been undertaken by the end of November. This was in line with expectations for the time of year.

Four audit reports had been produced since the last committee: Licensing Partnership, Debtors, Payroll and Corporate Governance – Annual Governance Statement.

In response to questions about the licensing partnership report, the Head of Finance explained that the Central Administration Unit for licensing comprised: Wellingborough, East Northamptonshire, Kettering, Corby and Daventry councils. A moderate assurance opinion had been given in respect of the licensing partnership and a number of recommendations – largely in respect of computer system developments – had been put in place to address issues found between the collection of licensing income on behalf of the council and reconciliation with premises to be licensed. Approximately £65,000 had not been satisfactorily reconciled in the last financial year.

The Head of Finance explained how the pre-agreed audit of the licensing computer system to be carried out next year would also add to improvements in the reconciliation of licensing fees.

In response to questions about the timescale for implementation of the recommendations, the Head of Finance felt that Wellingborough should work towards the end of March 2014, in line with East Northamptonshire District Council's internal audit schedule, as much of the implementation would be carried out by East Northamptonshire.

The Chief Internal Auditor summarised recommendations in the debtors report to develop the recording of debt recovery processes. Finance procedure notes were being produced to ensure the required audit trail was being followed.

It had been reiterated to Wellingborough Norse, who managed venue bookings for the council, that invoices were to be raised at the point of hire, rather than later in the process.

The Chief Internal Auditor had been able to report a significant assurance opinion of the outsourced payroll process, which was reassuring given the increased audit risks associated with outsourcing arrangements.

It had been recommended that security codes for the payroll office should be known only to a small number of officers, to increase security of confidential financial data. The Head of Finance had received advice that the health and safety implications of reduced access outweighed the anticipated security risks, so it had been decided to leave the access code unchanged.

As a full assurance opinion had been given in respect of the council's Annual Governance Statement, there were no recommendations to note.

The Chief Internal Auditor concluded his summary of audit progress by discussing the implementation of a new automated recommendation tracking system, which would require progress updates from managers responsible for each audit recommendation. This would encourage accountability and highlight progress issues to the Section 151 Officer.

RESOLVED that the report be noted as part of its role in ensuring that sufficient progress was being made against the agreed internal audit plan for the financial year.

5. **EXTERNAL AUDIT: VERBAL UPDATE**

The Head of Finance confirmed that the external auditors had found only a low level of discrepancies in the Annual Benefits subsidy claim audit which covered £26,000,000 worth of claims.

The Head of Finance reiterated that the statement of accounts was signed off and submitted on time; therefore Wellingborough had not been named as a

council who had been unable to close its accounts on time in the Audit Commission's report: Auditing the Accounts 2012-13. The Head of Finance advised Members that a briefing note on the external audit would be forthcoming.

RESOLVED to thank the finance team for their hard work and performance in the preparation and completion of the Annual Governance Statement.

Chairman

The meeting concluded at 7:40pm.

