Dear Sir/Madam,

Agenda Item No. 8 - Chairs' Reports

With reference to the above meeting to be held on the 25th March, 2013, I now attach the reports of the Chairs of the following Overview and Scrutiny Panels, which were marked “to follow” on the agenda:

(a) Economic and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny
(b) Housing, Health and Communities Overview and Scrutiny
(c) Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny

Yours faithfully,

ALAN FRANKS
Managing Director
The Economic & Corporate OSP (ECOSP) had a productive year in 2012/13 and completed its work programme. There remains a working group in progress as it could not finish its work in time for this meeting but it will report back to the next meeting of this OSC in May. This working group report will be making recommendations with regard to Member Development Opportunities for 2013/14. So we look forward to that.

The OSP have been following the development of the Council’s Website and have received regular updates regarding the implementation of the new website. Members thought that the new website had seen some improvement and whilst there had been some teething problems they were being dealt with. There is a website working group in place that is identifying concerns and issues.

The main areas for future development are around e-forms and increasing customers’ ability to do their Council business on-line. Whilst there are not a large number of NBBC residents with computers at home more and more people are using smart phones for these types of transactions. This together with the Council’s internal document management system TRIM, which is slowly becoming more widespread, should see a better sharing of information and increase the Council’s interface with the public, providing better service.

The Panel received information on several of the Council’s policy items which included the Equality & Diversity Scheme. Unfortunately the data for equalities was a little out of date as it relied on 2011 census information which had not yet been made available. The Council has reduced its spending on translating material for minority groups and had received 5 equality related complaints since April 2012.

Policy items also included Freedom Of Information (FOI) requests and how they were being dealt with. The number of FOI requests had risen considerably and Members were keen to know how these were recorded. Each FOI is given a reference number and a specified response time. They can be on many different matters and take officers some time to acquire and collate the information requested, particularly if they cross several departments. Once the requests have been answered the information should be published on the Council’s website in order that other may find it. The general view is that if the Council publishes its information properly where the public can find it then this should reduce the number of FOI requests. There were approx. 231 FOI requests in 2012/13.

All OSPs have raised concerns that the sickness absence for employees has not reduced as much as anticipated, and in fact has increased again this year. The ECOSP was requested therefore to look at Sickness Absence and Management

Members were advised by the Head of Human Resources that some inroads had been made over the past few years with sickness absence reducing from 14.22
days in 2004/5 to only 9.95 days in 2011/12. This year it was around 11 days. Following the introduction of the current policy with the triggers that prompt actions to be taken and more recently the engagement of DHS to manage the absence handling and recording improvements have been seen. Unfortunately with the introduction of single status, increased workload, and an ageing workforce, the make up of the absence has changed.

Short term sickness has reduced whilst long term sickness has increased. There has been a large increase over the past 2 years in people being absent as a result of stress related illness. This was particularly evident in areas where staff were public facing. Members were asked to put forward any suggestions that they felt would reduce sickness absence. A report will be brought back in the new municipal year following a policy review of absence management.

Another area that the OSP were requested to consider was Complaints reporting and monitoring. Members felt that the information provided in the Strategic Performance Report did not provide the whole picture. Members' complaints were not recorded as such, even though they were raised on behalf of residents. The OSP was advised that if they reported complaints/service failures through the Call Centre, rather than to department officers, they would get recorded and appear in the data in future. The number of complaints received through the Call Centre is only 0.35% of all the requests received.

The OSP has had several reports on the Council’s Emergency Communication Plan and in particular the Members concern and disappointment at the refusal of the Coventry Solihull and Warwickshire Resiliance (CSWR) to agree to contact the Officers of NBBC within a given time period, if there is an emergency situation underway. The OSP requested to Cabinet that a letter be sent to the County Council raising these matters and seeking resolution. Members felt that the Council was being put in a vulnerable position in not being able to assist residents in a timely manner.

By the following meeting of the OSP there had been an incident of flooding, this time at Weddington. Members heard that this Council was not advised of the problems in Weddington at all, even though the initial call had gone to the duty officer at 2.15am. The issue of sandbags was also raised by Members, as this area was prone to flooding access to sandbags should be readily available and people knowing where to go and what to do. The OSP were advised that promotions and information items are regularly put in In Touch. Members will continue to monitor the emergency planning situation.

Last year the Council introduced Blue Badge parking charges and the Panel were concerned that this be assessed after a period in order to see how it was working. The Council had provided more than the required amount in each car park. There has been ongoing consultation with various user groups and as a result whilst there was no evidence of concern relating to the charging for Blue Badge users there was a need to alter some of the ticketing arrangements to assist wheelchair users etc. Members were satisfied that there were a enough spaces currently provided.
The County Council issue the Blue Badges for residents and at present the badges do not assist the parking attendants in identifying the person as the picture is on the wrong side of the badge and can't be seen. It is thought that there is a lot of abuse of the badges with people parking on double yellow lines, using the badge when the disabled person is not present and on occasion the badge holder has passed away and the family continue to use it. The Panel requested that a letter be sent to County raising these issues.

Cllr B Hawkes
Chair – Economic & Corporate OSP
Housing, Health & Communities OSP Chair's Report

March 2013

The main areas of consideration for the Social Overview & Scrutiny Panel relate to Health, Housing and Community Safety and this year whilst the Panel has covered all these areas there has been a heavy emphasis on Health again.

The OSP was asked to take a presentation from the Post Office on the modernisation of the service. The Members heard that it was intended to modernise 6000 POs nationally with a view to reducing queues and improving the services provided. There are 20 POs in NBBC area and it intends to give every PO Master the opportunity to be modernised or stay as they are. For those that wish to opt out altogether, the PO will look to include the service within another local business.

The introduction of universal credits will require everyone to have a basic current account. The PO will provide digital kiosks within the shop for easy customer access. Members suggested that we may be able to work with the PO in providing direct debit payment through the kiosks to the Council in the future.

As always the Panel received quarterly reports from the Community Safety Partnership. It was pleasing to see that total recorded crime had come down but there were still concerns around violent crime, particularly Domestic Violence which remained at around 30% of Serious Violent Crime. Also vehicle crime and burglary were increasing. Hot spot areas were being targeted with leaflets to raise awareness and the Council, as always, was being proactive in its approach.

The OSP received an annual report on UChoose the choice based lettings scheme and was surprised to discover that the Housing Department were looking for another provider for the scheme. This should be in place early next year and the Panel will continue to monitor progress and requested some customer feedback to be included in this. Developers are being encouraged to provide 1 bedroom properties, particularly in the Bedworth area as there are none currently for tenants to downsize to.

The Panel was pleased that when audited our Child Protection Policy compliance, was commended. There have been 69 members of staff trained so far. Managers identify the job roles that they think require this training and then encourage the relevant officers to attend the session. It was suggested that Members should be being included on the training sessions as their role in the community could be valuable resource. This year there have been 24 referrals made and passed on to Social Services. The Council then receives feedback on the follow-up action taken. There have also been changes to CRB checks which should now be less onerous.
The health issues dealt with in the second part of this year were to find out what progress, if any, had been made with some of the local health services. These included Avenue Clinic, Mental Health Provision for Children & Young People, Drug and Alcohol Treatment Services, Eating Disorders and lastly but not least the George Eliot Hospital Foundation Trust status.

Avenue Clinic stated that the priority was to avoid hospital admissions where possible, by improving care at home. Therefore, whilst the number of people suffering from mental health problems had increased, the number of admissions had reduced. Efforts were made to ensure that those patients that are hospitalised were able to receive visitors and retain links with home.

The Mental Health Provision for Children and Young People had prioritised a reduction in its waiting lists and improvements to the key pathway work. Accessing services had proved difficult and was putting unnecessary pressure on the service providers. Resources were being made available to improve this situation.

The waiting times for children and young people in N. Warwickshire (inc. NBBC) has been reduced from 306 in February 2012 to zero. Some of the largest groups of service users were those with autism or self harmers. The service was also looking to increase psychiatric capacity in N. Warwickshire and work to reduce the differential between the north and the south of the County. Whilst there are not necessarily a greater number in need of the service there is a greater % with more complex needs in the north and they require more and various treatments.

Another area that comes under mental health is Eating Disorders. This came to the Panels attention last year when an item came on Woodleigh Beeches closure for Drugs & Alcohol Services. The Eating Disorder Services remained there and Members were interested to know more about the service.

The Panel were advised that it was a small service, which caters mainly for women and girls as nationally 99% of eating disorder patients are female. Of the approx. 2700 anorexics in Warwickshire 600 are from NBBC and of the 5400 with bulimia 1200 are from the Borough (based on national prevalence). Woodleigh Beeches is a national service not solely County based.

The Chief Executive of the George Eliot Hospital came for the second time this year to update the Panel on the progress the hospital was making both in performance and in securing Foundation Trust Status.

The hospital had seen an increase in the number of patients requiring beds so had a low number of empty beds and were currently managing the situation. There had been some media coverage on the high rate of mortality at the hospital but this was reducing. Members were advised that the reasons for this included the fact that there was no hospice in the area which meant care homes and carers would admit patients prior to death. To improve rates the hospital has increased the ratio of doctors and nurses on duty, many working a rota that now includes weekends across services. The Panel was also
advised that a very Senior Paediatrician had now been appointed to the hospital which would assist in retaining District Hospital status. The GEH requested that the Council continue to support the hospital and assist them in maintaining a full spectrum of services. A review would be undertaken of Emergency Surgical Services shortly and it would be important that the hospital retained this for the future.

The Hospital would be going through the contract tendering process to find a partner for Trust Status and it is anticipated that it should be ready to go forward with that partner as a trust in July/August next year. There is no requirement for them to consult on this but Kevin McGee agreed they will come back to the OSP before then.

Following the removal of the budget by the County Council for the Youth Service the emphasis had changed to target Youth Support, looking specifically at early intervention with NEETS/Drug services/ASB and other criminal activity. With the closure of the Youth Club buildings some have found alternative accommodation and so have remained viable. The street projects that used to take place in Nuneaton have now moved to St Nicholas’s Church. There has also been an increase in one to one work with young people that get into difficulties. Emphasis is on sharing care across agencies to compliment rather than duplication. The Service has had its staffing reduce but it is aiming to engage with the voluntary sector to deliver in the longer term.

New legislation this year required that Social Landlords were required to assist and support their tenants to form Tenant Scrutiny Panels which will scrutinise the management of the housing service. It is envisaged that the Tenants Scrutiny Panel will carry out project based scrutiny and will then report their findings to the HHCOSP. There was some reluctance on behalf of tenants to get involved with this, at that time however, so progress may be slow.

After much anticipation the Civic Hall report finally came to the OSP. It identified areas for improvement and an opportunity to take the Civic Hall forward into the future. Members made suggestions as to how electronic bookings could be improved to include children’s tickets, appreciated the improvement to the website and requested that the audience figures be reported back to the Panel in the new municipal year.

The main working group of the OSP this year has been the review of the Health Inequalities project Motiv8 and the recommendations that went to Cabinet recently. The main thrust of the report was that Motiv8 had been a good learning tool but the main area in relation to Health Inequalities was to look at how the Council could improve things in the borough by putting a health aspect on everything that we do. Eg: Assess and incorporate health into services, policies and develop every opportunity to drive down inequality and increase health and wellbeing for all residents.
In the February meeting of the Panel there were some housing matters brought forward. The Members had a deal of discussion with the Director of Housing on homelessness. The numbers have risen and this means the borough is outperforming the rest of Warwickshire with on average 15 people per week presenting as homeless. The Department is working with all agencies and partners to deal with the situation and at present they are coping. The main aim is to try and advise and assist people to prevent homelessness in the first place.

Members requested an item on the New Homes Bonus in order that they could fully understand the criteria used, how it was funded and where it could be spent. Members were advised that it was essentially a financial scheme linked to planning and was a government reward incentive for areas that accepted new build. The Council has to date received £1.6m and spent £80k of it on investing to save through the Lean System Reviews which has so far saved the Council approx £2m.

Earlier in the year the OSP received the draft Empty Property Strategy and made recommendations to be considered and included in the final document. The Strategy had been out for wider consultation also but Members had some concerns that the Empty Property Officer had still be been appointed. The Panel were advised that the appointment had stalled as there was now a case being prepared for a shared service option with another authority. This could save the Council money in the longer term. The Empty Property Officer would split their time 50/50 and initially would look at short term empty properties in order to prevent them from becoming longer term empties. Members suggested that there could also be some areas of shared work between housing and planning/development in the future.

Each year NABSCOP brings its Strategic Assessment document to the OSP for consideration and discussion. This document outlines the priorities that it will set for the coming year and aims to be in line with issues of greatest importance locally. This year’s priorities are to be Violence, Inquisitive Crime (burglary/vehicle crime), ASB and cross cutting themes such as alcohol, drugs, hate crime, metal theft and prevention of re-offending.

At the final meeting of the HHCOSP on 19 March, unfortunately too late for this written report, the Panel received reports on Modernisation of Drug & Alcohol Service and the Family Intervention Project which were both attended by outside officers. There were also two reports relating to Council services Re-Decoration Allowances and a presentation on the progress that the Museum has achieved over the past year.

Cllr S Doughty
Chair of Housing, Health & Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel
The Planning and Environment OSP (PEOSP) has been somewhat thwarted with its work programme this year and has several items remaining. This is as a result of the delays in the Borough Plan and the confidentiality around issues that were contained within it or connected to it. It is hoped that these matters will be progressed at the earliest opportunity in 2013/14.

The OSP wanted to assess how the revised kerbside recycling and refuse collection service had worked out and whether the public had taken to the new systems. Members were advised that the launch had gone well but that further education was needed to assist the public with using the kitchen caddies. Our recycling rates should show improvement although the Council is unable to compete with the rest of the County on green waste.

Next year the Council will also be able to recycle trade waste and there is an intention to curb the amount of metal waste collected illegally. Further work is to be done on recycling at flats and the Members suggested that the issue of facilities at flats should be included when Planning consider new developments.

As part of the workload of the OSP it considers RIPA which is the legislation in relation to overt and covert surveillance. The legislation had changed and Members were advised that ASB could no longer be observed by camera as only matters that carried a 6mth or longer prison term were now subject to RIPA. At a later meeting of the OSP the reviewed policy document incorporating the changes was approved for forwarding to Cabinet.

Some Members of the Panel have been involved this year, with work groups and these produced excellent reports. The first was consideration of the use in the borough of Dog Control Orders which will improve enforcement against dog fouling and dogs running out of control. The proposals for Dog Control Orders will go out to public consultation prior to implementation in the new municipal year.

The other working group looked at outside drinking related to the Designated Public Place Order (DPPO) that the Council put in place some years ago. The group wanted to review how effective it had been at reducing drinking in the Parks and other open space. Members were advised that since the DPPO had been put in place, the powers of the police had been increased so the DPPO was not so relevant. The group made recommendations to Cabinet which suggested that there was no need to remove the DPPO as PCSOs and the others had some delegated powers of enforcement. It was also identified that whilst the level of outside drinking, particularly by young people, had not diminished since the introduction of DPPOs there were also other initiatives that the Council could do though its communities, licensing and planning
sections. Members raised concerns regarding the possible use of Council Officers in enforcing DPPOs as it was felt that the Police should be carrying out these duties more thoroughly.

Following the work done last year on the Allotment Review, this year the OSP received the draft Allotment Strategy and the proposed new Allotment lease. The Panel were pleased with the result and the strategy progressed to Cabinet for final approval.

An area of interest to the OSP is grounds maintenance, Members receive many complaints and comments on grass cutting and litter particularly. Therefore last year, when the contracts for grounds maintenance were reviewed, the Panel requested that a report would come back on how they were performing.

The report received showed that the satisfaction from residents had improved but there were concerns as to the number of satisfaction cards being distributed by the Contractor. The Council would therefore send out some survey forms to compare satisfaction results with theirs.

The Members identified the areas in their wards where there were particular problems around the litter being left in bushes and shrubs after pruning. There were also areas where Members were unsure as to who had responsibility for grass cutting and litter picking. The Panel was advised that in the main verges at the side of roads were the responsibility of the County Council however, in order to maintain a good appearance within the Towns the grounds maintenance team also carried out grass cutting, weed killing and litter picking in some of these areas.

The OSP suggested that it would be useful for Glendale to accompany Members on the estate walkabouts so that problems could be raised directly with them. Also that ward councillors should be advised when the Council Officer and Glendale quality inspections were undertaken, in order for them to attend.

Members were pleased to note that a Tree Officer had now commenced employment with the Council as there were several areas that required attention.

There is to be another Green Gym to be sited in Miners Welfare Park shortly making a total of 4 in the borough. The Panel received information which highlighted that the Council doesn’t monitor the use of these facilities so it is difficult to tell how much impact they are having. Members felt that they were an asset to the local communities, particularly those who could not easily get to more formal leisure facilities due to transport or financial issues.
With improved health being a priority for the Council the installation of this equipment should be welcomed and when appropriate further consideration be given to installations elsewhere when new developments are being planned.

Through the course of the year there had been some concerns raised regarding the review and proposed changes to Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE). Whilst the responsibility for CPE rests with the County Council the service is delivered in Nuneaton and Bedworth by Rugby Borough Council. Members were concerned that the quality of service that the borough receives should be improved and wanted to have some input into the process. The Panel suggested that a joint scrutiny review with the other councils affected may be in order. However, this has now been taken forward by scrutiny at the County Council.

Cllr Don Navarro
Chair of Planning & Environment OSP