

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive

At 10.00 am on Thursday 14th September, 2023 in the Council Chamber, Corby Cube, George Street, Corby, NN17 1QG

Present:-

Members

Councillor Helen Howell (Deputy Leader of the Council)	Councillor Scott Edwards
Councillor Matt Binley	Councillor Helen Harrison
Councillor David Brackenbury	Councillor David Howes
Councillor Lloyd Bunday	Councillor Harriet Pentland

Also in attendance – Councillors Keli Watts, Lyn Buckingham, Jonathan Ekins, Anne Lee, Dorothy Maxwell, Ross Armour

492 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jason Smithers and Cllr Mark Rowley.

Apologies were also received from:

- Monitoring Officer, Adele Wylie
- Executive Director of Finance, Janice Gotts
- Executive Director of Children's Services, AnnMarie Dodds
- Executive Director of Adults, Health Partnerships & Housing, David Watts
- Assistant Chief Executive, Guy Holloway

493 Minutes of the Meetings Held on 3rd August 2023 and 17th August 2023

RESOLVED that the Executive agreed the minutes of the meetings held on 3rd August 2023 and 17th August 2023 as true and accurate records of the meetings.

494 Members' Declarations of Interest

A personal interest was declared by Cllr Harriet Pentland relating to any agenda items where she had been in attendance at meetings at which the subject matter in question may have previously been discussed.

495 Notifications of requests to address the meeting

The Chair, Councillor Helen Howell reported that there were requests to address the meeting as set out below:

Agenda Item	Speakers
Item 5 - Performance Indicator Report 2023/24 (Period 4 – July 2023)	Cllrs Anne Lee & William Colquhoun
Item 6 - Bus Service Improvement Plan plus (BSIP+) Funding	Cllrs Dorothy Maxwell, Anne Lee and Lyn Buckingham
Item 7 – Kettering Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan	Cllr Anne Lee
Item 8 - Hackney Carriage De-zoning, Hackney Carriage Byelaws and Hackney Carriage Number Limits	Cllrs Dorothy Maxwell and William Colquhoun Mr Neil Rielly
Item 9 – North Northamptonshire Greenway Strategy	Cllrs Ross Armour, Dorothy Maxwell and Lyn Buckingham
Item 10 – Kettering Artificial Pitch – Lease and Investment	Cllr Ross Armour
Item 11 – Sustainable Modes of Travel to School Strategy	Cllrs Dorothy Maxwell and Lyn Buckingham
Item 12 - The Chief Principal Social Worker’s Annual Report	Cllr Dorothy Maxwell
Item 13 - Energy Procurement Contract	Cllr Dorothy Maxwell
Item 15 - Budget Forecast Update 2023-24 - Period 3	Cllr Anne Lee and Lyn Buckingham

Cllr William Colquhoun was not in attendance at the meeting and consequently did not speak on agenda items 5 and 8.

Cllr Dorothy Maxwell opted not to speak in relation to agenda items 12 and 13.

496 Performance Indicator Report 2023/24 (Period 4 - July 2023)

The Chair invited Cllr Anne Lee to address the meeting. Cllr Lee noted the implication of delays in deciding planning applications, referencing the consequences for those effected by delays. Cllr Lee also raised concerns regarding an increase to the number of children missing from education at the end of July.

The Chair then invited the Executive Member for Finance and Transformation, Cllr Lloyd Bunday to introduce a report that sought to provide an update on the performance of the Council across a range of services as measured by performance indicators (PIs), as well as setting out the progress that was being made in the development of the Council’s performance monitoring arrangements.

Cllr Bunday reported that the Period 4 report showed 23 indicators on or exceeding their target, with five inside tolerance levels, nine performing below target levels and 11 having insufficient data to allow for reporting. Of the PIs reported for the period, 25 had shown improvement with nine deteriorating since the previous reporting period.

Cllr Bunday referenced positive performances in regard to indicators for Greener, Sustainable Environment and those relating to Safe and Thriving Places. It was noted that there was a balanced picture for indicators relating to Modern Public Services and Active Fulfilled Lives.

Cllr David Brackenbury spoke to welcome the latest performance indicators and noted the significant work underway to tackle the issue of planning application determinations.

Cllr Scott Edwards spoke to reference Cllr Lee's concerns regarding the number of children missing from education, noting that the figure covered a period to the end of the summer holiday period and figures for the new school year could provide a different picture. Cllr Edwards also stated he would request a report on children missing from education on a long-term basis.

Cllr Helen Harrison spoke to note that the performance indicator for NHS Health Checks offered was on target for the first time, with ongoing work to ensure health checks offered were taken up.

RESOLVED

That the Executive:

- a) Noted the performance of the Council as measured by the available indicators at Period 4 (July) 2023/24, set out in the appendix to the report.

Reason for Recommendations: to better understand the Council's performance as measured by Key Performance Indicators as at Period 4 (July) 2023/24.

Alternative Options Considered: Reporting performance data on a less frequent basis is an option but monthly reporting is considered useful at this stage of the Council's existence, reporting alongside budget information.

497 Bus Service Improvement Plan Plus (BSIP+) Funding

The Chair invited Cllr Dorothy Maxwell to speak in relation to this item. Cllr Maxwell noted a lack of new bus routes being established in recent times, noting a decrease in passenger numbers since the Covid pandemic and a lack of rural service options. Cllr Maxwell also noted the lack of connections to hospitals and other local facilities, stating that services should be increased to offer an effective service for all across Northamptonshire and beyond.

Cllr Anne Lee was invited to address the Executive. Cllr Lee noted that the additional government funding was a positive news story but raised concerns regarding a lack of connectivity to Kettering General Hospital, Kettering Tesco and levelling-up areas.

Cllr Lyn Buckingham then spoke to welcome the report but raised concerns regarding commercial operators potentially ceasing bus services. Cllr Buckingham stated that the Council should be driving improvements to bus service networks for leisure, education and employment, but connectivity would only work if there remained bus services to access.

Cllr Binley responded to the comments made by speakers by referencing the positive nature of the report and the number of bus services retained locally in comparison to other areas outside North Northamptonshire. It was acknowledged that the frequency of certain services may have reduced, but no local routes had been withdrawn since

the Covid pandemic. Cllr Binley noted issues with direct services to Kettering General Hospital but confirmed that there were bus routes that accessed the hospital, although a transfer may be required.

Cllr Binley noted that bus service provision was highly user driven, if services were not utilised, they were in danger of being lost, especially in light of passenger numbers only returning to around 90% of pre-pandemic levels.

Cllr Binley then introduced a report that requested the Executive to note the receipt of Bus Service Improvement Plan plus (BSIP+) funding to the value of £560,412 for 2023/24, and to agree it be spent on improving bus services in North Northamptonshire in accordance with the terms and conditions as detailed in Appendix A to the report.

It was heard that in May 2023, £160m of funding had been allocated from the Department for Transport for local authorities to improve fares, services and infrastructure, with a further £140m provided to bus service operators to help protect essential services. At the same time, the government had also announced the extension of the £2 fare cap until the end of October 2023, rising to £2.50 until the end of November 2024.

The meeting noted government support to the bus industry since the start of the pandemic, with the same level of BSIP+ funding also allocated for 2024/25, dependant on the Council's bus budget being maintained at least at the current level of £275,000 bus subsidy and £2,907,320 of concessionary fares. Any unspent funding for 2023/24 could be rolled over to the next financial year to carry out targeted actions to deliver the best outcomes for the bus services by:

- Continuing to fund existing bus services where they represented value for money or maintained essential connectivity for local communities;
- Increasing service frequency or restoring services withdrawn since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic where there was a reasonable prospect of the service becoming commercially viable within the BSIP+ funding period; and
- Forward funding improvements where S106 developer funding was due before the end of the BSIP+ funding period to increase the time period for the service to achieve commercial viability.

The meeting heard that should the recommendations be approved, the next step would be to work with bus operators to ascertain whether any service reductions were planned, noting that operators were only required to provide 70 days' notice to reduce or withdraw services. Work would also be undertaken with operators in regard to the actions listed above in order to produce a list of proposed service interventions designed to grow long-term patronage and revenues, whilst maintaining service levels to ensure social and economic connectivity for the community.

Cllr Harriet Pentland spoke in support of the aims of the report, recognising the importance of services for local people. Cllr Pentland also referenced the discussion of the topic at the recent Sustainable Communities EAP, that highlighted the need for funding and for it to be maximised locally.

Cllr Helen Harrison welcomed the report and the additional funding that would enable the Council to enhance local bus services, noting the positive impact good connectivity

had on health and wellbeing. Extended rural bus services would be one area for examination should funding be available for this purpose.

Cllr David Brackenbury also welcomed the funding from government, noting the need for the Council to work with service operators to provide the most comprehensive service possible, whilst cognisant of the fact that services needed to be utilised by passengers in order to remain viable.

Cllr David Howes noted the desire to see increases to available services, particularly in rural areas, noting examples of local communities coming together to successfully operate their own services.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- a) Noted the allocation of £569,412 of Bus Service Improvement Plan plus funding for each of the financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25;
- b) Noted that the allocation of future funding including the Bus Service Improvement Plan plus funding for 2024/25 is dependent on the Council's overall bus budget (comprising the bus subsidy budget of £275,000 and concessionary fares budget of £2,907,320) not being reduced.
- c) Delegated authority to the Executive Member for Highways, Travel & Assets in consultation with the Executive Director of Place & Economy to take any actions needed to award the local bus service contracts and any further decisions/actions relating to expenditure of the BSIP+ funding.

Reason for Recommendations – To spend the external funding in accordance with the terms and conditions of the grant.

Alternative Options Considered – The Council could choose not to accept the external funding or to spend it in ways which were inconsistent with the terms and conditions of the grant. This would not be in the best interest of the community and would jeopardise future funding allocations. Launching new services in areas with limited demand for bus travel is unlikely to represent value for money in achieving the objectives of the funding, and not appropriate with no long-term funding certainty.

498 Kettering Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)

The Chair invited Cllr Anne Lee to address the meeting. Cllr Lee praised the report and thanked officers for their hard work in producing such a transparent, well-researched document. Cllr Lee noted that availability of safe cycle parking provision at either end of a trip did influence the decision of whether to undertake journeys by bicycle.

The Chair then invited Cllr Matt Binley to introduce a report that sought to provide information on the Kettering Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), reported on the findings from the recent public consultation for the plan and sought approval for its adoption and progression of the proposals contained within it.

Cllr Binley thanked Cllr Lee for her comments, noting that the report not only linked into the Greenway Strategy report elsewhere on the agenda, but also Sustainable Modes of Travel to School Strategy that was also set for consideration.

Cllr Binley noted that the results of the public consultation indicated 81% of respondents being in support of the LCWIP, with only 3% against. The report itself contained a significant quantity of supporting information, including the draft plan, engagement report and public consultation report.

It was noted that LCWIPs were recommended by the Department for Transport for short and long-term provisions for cycling and walking within the local area. The plan before members had been developed to identify prioritised cycling and walking infrastructure improvements for future investment. It was also to ensure that consideration be given to cycling and walking within both local planning and transport policies and strategies, and to make the case for future funding for walking and cycling infrastructure.

The meeting noted the significant level of analysis undertaken in regard to current provisions, as well as looking at the potential for new walking and cycling routes. Feedback from the public consultation had been taken into consideration as part of the technical report.

The proposals had been considered by the Sustainable Communities EAP, with no objections raised, while the Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee had welcomed the progress made to date.

It was noted that should the report be approved, a final version of the LCWIP would be published on the Council's website and work would commence on the development of preliminary designs for the routes and improvements identified, helping to form future funding bids.

Cllr Scott Edwards spoke to support the report, stating that he had attended two of the engagement sessions, referencing the need to reduce reliance on cars to transport children to school by improving cycle-friendly transport links.

Cllr Helen Harrison commended the report as an exciting piece of work that would assist in improving sustainable transport options, offering a tangible and positive impact on the health and wellbeing of residents.

Cllr Harriet Pentland welcomed the report, noting the level of public support for the proposals and the benefit of its development in conjunction with the community. Cllr Pentland noted the green thread running through the work of the Council in various different sectors.

The Chair concluded debate by speaking in full support of the report and its recommendations.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- a) Noted the findings of the public consultation analysis for the Kettering Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) which forms **Appendix C** of this report;
- b) Approved and adopted the Draft Kettering LCWIP which forms **Appendix A** of this report as a Council policy document;
- c) Agreed that the prioritisation of routes within the Kettering LCWIP should form the basis of work to develop preliminary designs for the routes within existing budgets to form the basis of future funding bids. Any further external funding secured as a result will form the basis of future report(s) to Executive.

Reason for Recommendations – Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) are the recommended Department for Transport approach for planning and co-ordinating provision for active travel modes. They provide a strategic and planned approach for short and long term provision for cycling and walking within the local area.

The Kettering LCWIP has been developed to enable NNC to:

- Identify prioritised cycling and walking infrastructure improvements for future investment;
- Ensure that consideration is given to cycling and walking within both local planning and transport policies and strategies; and
- Make the case for future funding for walking and cycling infrastructure.

Alternative Options Considered – While it would be possible to develop an LCWIP based on a different methodology to that contained in Government guidance on LCWIPs, this is not recommended as it would mean that the Council was less likely to secure Government funding. However, should alternative funding (such as S106) become available for particular corridors, it would be possible to progress lower priority schemes on that basis.

499 **Hackney Carriage De-zoning, Hackney Carriage Byelaws and Hackney Carriage Number Limits**

The Chair invited Cllr Dorothy Maxwell to address the Executive. Cllr Maxwell spoke to support the proposal of replacing the current four Hackney Carriage Zones in North Northamptonshire with one zone for the whole area and referenced the need for consistency across taxi operations.

The Chair then invited Neil Rielly to speak. Mr Rielly objected to the proposal of removing the current zones and made reference to the perceived damage that harmonisation of taxi services had caused to the trade locally. Mr Rielly also made

reference to the increased knowledge taxi drivers would require to ensure shortest routes were taken for fares across North Northamptonshire.

The Chair then invited Cllr David Brackenbury, Executive Member for Growth and Regeneration to introduce a report that sought approval of the commencement of a consultation process on the potential removal of the current four Hackney Carriage zones and replacement with one North Northamptonshire Zone. A review of associated Hackney Carriage Byelaws would also be required should the consultation process be approved.

Cllr Brackenbury thanked the speakers for their comments and emphasised that no conclusion as to the potential removal of the Hackney Carriage zones had been drawn, and that the views of all respondents to the full public consultation on the matter would be considered prior to any decision being reached.

It was heard that when North Northamptonshire Council had formed, for the purposes of Hackney Carriage licensing, the previous former authority areas continued to be the zones for licensing purposes including licences, vehicle plates, byelaws, fare tariffs and fees and charges. It was suggested that a consultation process be undertaken with a review for the potential removal of these zones to be replaced with one Council-wide zone to allow for efficiencies of scale and to provide the same service for all residents of North Northamptonshire.

It was noted that Department for Transport (DfT) guidance suggested that operation of one zone was best practice, with the consultation, if approved, due to last 12 weeks with input of the trade and its users sought. Cllr Brackenbury thanked officers and the Licensing and Appeals Committee for their work to date and stated that a robust response to the consultation would to be welcomed.

The Chair then invited the Chair of the Licensing and Appeals Committee, Cllr Jonathan Ekins to provide comment on the proposals. Cllr Ekins noted that it was not legally possible to amalgamate zones and also made reference to DfT guidance that one zone was best practice. Cllr Ekins stated that a single zone would reduce travelling costs and offer a more competitive, efficient and environmentally sustainable taxi service in North Northamptonshire. Cllr Ekins noted the consideration of the Sustainable Communities and Prosperous Communities Sustain Executive Advisory Panels (EAPs) and that the consultation outcome would be brought back to the Licensing and Appeals Committee before a final decision was made by the Executive.

Cllr Matt Binley spoke to note that he had chaired the Prosperous Communities EAP where approval had been provided for this matter undergoing public consultation, and noted cross-party support in this consideration.

RESOLVED

That the Executive;

- i) Approved commencement of a consultation process on the potential removal of the current four hackney carriage zones and replacement with one NNC zone;
- ii) Approved that the current Hackney Carriage Byelaws are reviewed.

Reason for Recommendation: Following the alignment of the hackney carriage tariff of fares and implementation of one Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy covering the whole of NNC's area implemented on 1st April 2023, it is appropriate to consider the retention of four separate zones for hackney carriage licencing. The review of the zones necessitates a review of the byelaws which govern hackney carriage licencing.

Alternative Options Considered in relation to the zones;

- i) To take no action and retain the current four hackney carriage zones.
- ii) Determine that this matter requires further consideration, but now is not the correct time to consider this matter and defer consultation to a later date.

Alternative Option Considered in relation to the byelaws;

- i) To take no action and retain the current Hackney Carriage Byelaws.

500 North Northamptonshire Greenway Strategy

The Chair invited Cllr Ross Armour to address the meeting. Cllr Armour welcomed the report but noted that a number of trails for development of the Greenway would rely on the good will of landowners. Cllr Armour also made reference to maintenance of the Greenway and the need for a funding strategy to undertake this. In relation to the Greenway between Wellingborough and Rushden there remained questions around flood-risk assessments as well as access to Irchester Country Park.

Cllr Dororthy Maxwell was then invited to speak. Cllr Maxwell also welcomed the report and noted the work of former East Northamptonshire councillor, Sarah Peacock in helping to create the Rushden Link. Cllr Maxwell thanked all those involved in the production of the positive strategy but noted that there would be a need for additional signage as well as litter and dog waste bins along the route.

Cllr Lyn Buckingham then addressed the Executive and also welcomed the report, noting the importance of the Greenway in linking tourist hotspots, referencing a former bus route that had formerly fulfilled this role. Cllr Buckingham queried whether a river-based taxi could offer a similar service. Cllr Buckingham also made reference to maintenance of waterways and biodiversity net gain considerations as part of the strategy.

The Chair, Cllr Helen Howell thanked the speakers for their comments before introducing a report that sought to introduce the North Northamptonshire Greenway Strategic Masterplan and the Feasibility Study for the proposed Rushden to Wellingborough phase of the Greenway and additionally requested approval to publicly consult on both the strategy and the Feasibility Study.

In response to comments from speakers, the Chair noted that work was ongoing to build relationships with landowners where land formed part of the proposed Greenway and confirmed maintenance of the route would be carried out, with work required in regard to signage and waste provision. The Chair also paid tribute to the work of Sarah Peacock, noting that it was positive to see the legacy of her efforts continuing.

The Chair noted that the Greenway Strategy fed into the Council's developing Tourism Strategy and would encourage local businesses to be involved, such as potentially offering bike hire facilities for use along the network. It was heard that Cllr Harriet Pentland was in contact with the Environment Agency to encourage maintenance of waterways they held responsibility for.

The meeting heard that work on the strategy had commenced in March 2023, alongside Phil Jones Associates, engineering consultants that had undertaken a national and local policy review to inform the context for the strategy, which demonstrated significant policy support for a strategic active travel network. A variety of other data sets had been collected and analysed to inform network alignments. A series of workshops had also been held to engage key stakeholders.

The meeting noted that the strategy would be widely consulted upon and refined following feedback received. Once finalised, the plan would be submitted for adoption to ensure it carried planning weight and could feed into other Council policies and strategies, including the emerging Strategic Plan for North Northamptonshire.

The Chair referenced the Feasibility Study for the Rushden to Wellingborough phase of the Greenway that sought the creation of a new commuter and leisure route utilising existing lanes, Rights of Way and access tracks.

The meeting heard that a Greenway Programme Board had been established in early 2022 with a number of key stakeholders and organisations involved, plus four Council members as area leads to assist in shaping the Greenway throughout North Northamptonshire. The aims of the strategy were detailed to the meeting. The Chair stated that a series of "design recommendation booklets" would be produced providing clear summaries of each Greenway route.

Concluding, the Chair thanked all those involved in the project to date, including officers, internal and external stakeholders and area leads.

Cllr Harriet Pentland welcomed the vital strategy before members and noted that the Greenway was a fantastic asset that was already well-used and would be boosted by expansion. Cllr Pentland noted that the strategy had been discussed at length by the Sustainable Communities EAP, the panel offering strong support for the recommendations.

Cllr David Brackenbury spoke to welcome the excellent report and masterplan that would underpin much of what the Council aimed to achieve in producing a rich, diverse area with opportunities for active lives and travel. Cllr Brackenbury further welcomed S106 developer contributions and noted that other funding pots could be accessed as well as the need to engage successfully with local landowners.

Cllr Helen Harrison noted that the report before members showed the Council leading the way in delivering a key strategic plan that was a vital piece of the work the authority was trying to achieve in North Northamptonshire.

Cllr Matt Binley noted the holistic approach the Council was taking to these kinds of issues and made reference to similar matters previously considered by the Executive that improved outcomes for local residents.

The Chair concluded debate by seeking engagement from as wide an audience as possible to support the development of the strategy before members.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- a) Approved the Greenway Strategic Masterplan for public consultation;
- b) Approved the Feasibility Study for the proposed Rushden to Wellingborough Greenway for public consultation; and
- c) Delegated authority to the Executive Member for Sport, Leisure, Culture and Tourism, in consultation with the Director of Public Health to make any amendments to the documents as a result of the public consultation, ahead of them being brought back to the Executive for adoption.

Reasons for Recommendations

- To support the Council and its partners to prioritise future routes for the Greenway and to inform future feasibility studies which will assist the Council to secure developer contributions and other external funding to deliver the programme.
- To allow for public consultation on the draft strategy and Rushden to Wellingborough Greenway Feasibility Study.

Alternative Options Considered: The alternative option would be to not have a Greenway Strategic Masterplan. However, this would not be a recommended approach as the strategy clearly outlines what the priority routes are for North Northamptonshire, based on comprehensive data and evidence, will inform future feasibility studies, which are required to secure external funding and developer contributions to enable the expansion of the Greenway across North Northamptonshire. It will also ensure a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of the Greenway.

501 Kettering Artificial Pitch

The Chair invited Cllr Ross Armour to address the meeting. Cllr Armour welcomed the report as a good news story, stating that it was key for the Council to develop its relationship with Northamptonshire Football Association (NFA) and how quickly the artificial pitch could be resurfaced. It was heard that once that work had been completed it was vital that use of the facility be made available fairly to allow use by the whole community.

The Chair thanked Cllr Armour for his comments noting that access to use of the artificial pitch would need to be ensured for the whole community. The Chair then introduced a report that sought approval to enter into a concession contract along with

a long-term ancillary lease agreement and submission of a funding bid to the Football Foundation to redevelop the artificial sports pitch and pavilion at Thurston Drive in Kettering.

It was noted that the existing artificial pitch had been in a condemned condition for a number of years, with the pavilion and athletics track requiring investment. The arrangement set out in the report would also support Kettering Harriers Athletics Club and assist in securing future investment into the athletics track and facilities to ensure the club met current and future England Athletics standards. It was heard that the estimated costs of the work were likely to be between £800,000 and £850,000.

The Council had been approached by NFA offering support for the continuation of facility provision at the site and to redevelop both football and athletic facilities. The NFA was keen to have a permanent base on the site to support grassroots delivery of football and to support the development of athletics provision and facilities alongside the Council, Kettering Harriers Athletic Club and England Athletics.

The proposal would be for NFA to take on management of the facility with a suggested 30-year lease and responsible for repairs maintenance, energy costs and Business Rates as well as a requirement to establish a sinking fund of up to £30,000 annually for a minimum of ten years towards future costs of pitch resurfacing. Should facility income generation exceed operational costs, a net profit share arrangement would be in place.

The Executive heard that a contract variation would be required to remove the facilities from the existing Freedom Leisure contract and end the lease with Kettering Harriers Athletic Club.

It was noted that the project offered a good opportunity for the Council to realise investment in leisure provision in Kettering by attracting grant funding, and to deliver high quality and accessible facilities for the community alongside the NFA.

Cllr Scott Edwards spoke to welcome the report, noting the opportunity for great partnership working that would encourage local people to engage in sporting activities across multiple sports.

Cllr Lloyd Bunday also spoke to welcome the report, noting the disrepair of the current pitch provision and the positivity of the NFA wishing to base themselves at the site and take on management responsibility for the facility.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- a) Approved the proposal to develop the Council's relationship with the Northamptonshire Football Association (NFA) by way of a concession contract together with an ancillary long-term peppercorn lease for a 30-year period, to include an agreement for continued use for Harriers Athletics club.

- b) Noted that the grant of the lease will require the NFA to have financial repairing responsibilities for the site including business rates and insurance, the agreement will include a net profit share. The agreement will be a secure business tenancy but will not have an automatic right of renewal.
- c) Approved the proposal for a contract variation for the Freedom Leisure contract to remove the facilities from the existing Leisure contract and end the lease with Harriers Athletics club.
- d) Noted the development of the Football Foundation funding application for the site, by North Northamptonshire Council in collaboration with the NFA.

Reasons for Recommendations

- The artificial pitch, pavilion and athletics track all need investment. The NFA are a credible organisation intent on providing football opportunities for the community. The proposed way forward will enable increased funding opportunities, redevelopment of the site and development of a delivery programme, supporting existing and future users.
- Match funding from the Council of £150k has already been identified within existing Leisure Services Capital budgets, the earmarking of this budget has been discussed and agreed at Strategic Capital Board in April 2022. This would attract maximum return from the Football Foundation with the NFA support.
- The Community will see an increase in quality of the facilities and services on offer in Kettering.
- The NFA will create a sinking fund for redevelopment in future years to comply with Football Foundation funding requirements which will secure investment in future years.
- To have increased opportunities of success to redevelop the areas needed, to ensure that the whole scheme is delivered to support the sports on the site and to achieve maximum leverage of funding from the Council's £150k capital investment, the NFA is the only organisation who will be able to achieve this from the Football Foundation as they are the National Governing body for Football and also have the staff resource to manage the site and deliver the sports development programmes.

Alternative Options Considered.

- *Continuation of scheme by the Council and no NFA involvement* - The Council continue to develop and submit the funding application to the Football Foundation on its own to redevelop the artificial pitch. This would limit the opportunities for success as the Council would not be able to leverage the percentage funding needed for the site and could result in just a resurface of the pitch. This in isolation would potentially be deemed insufficient by the Football Foundation to demonstrate viable security of payback of investment. The level of staffing resource to manage the site and future delivery of the sport development programme would put extreme pressure on the in-house leisure team and restrict other areas of

work for the Leisure Services.

- *Freedom Leisure* - continue with the leisure operator managing the site as part of one of the Kettering Leisure Contracts. The associated revenue and capital investment costs required for the site will put increased cost pressures onto the leisure contractor. The escalating costs of this type of project significantly reduce the viability for leisure providers. The requirement for match funding and the future ability to leverage further funding would be as limited as if the Council were to lead the project, and so could result in the project being just a pitch resurface and deemed insufficient for the Football Foundation funding application. It is fair to assume that there would also be further demands on NNC Leisure to provide expert support in ensuring the funding criteria is met, at a time when workforce demand is at capacity. Under the Football Foundation grant terms and conditions, a sinking fund must be established to ensure £20k/£30k is annually ringfenced for 10 years, to make end of warranty, surface replacement possible. It would be incumbent on Freedom Leisure to ensure that there is enough income generated to cover this and NNC to maintain budgets throughout the lifecycle. There is only 5 years left on the Freedom Leisure contract which makes any investment of resource unattractive to the contractor.
- *Community Asset Transfer* to Northamptonshire Football Association – the asset would be transferred in perpetuity; this would not allow time to fully develop and embed a relationship with the NFA. The delay that this process would entail could undermine the timing of an expert third party seeking an opportunity to deliver from this type of site and may mean they explore a similar alternative elsewhere. There has already been a lengthy delay in re-establishing the provision at the pitch and what this means for the local community who want to see this site back in action as soon as possible.
- *Do nothing on the site and to not invest in the facilities* - this would be of detriment to football and athletics offer for Kettering and North Northamptonshire. The Council is committed to supporting the community to be active and provide quality facilities and opportunities for its residents. The local community, football clubs and development opportunities have been limited and restricted since the pitch was closed for use. The community have been keen to see the pitch resurfaced and opened for use, they have been successful in raising funds for football in the area. The funding contributed towards some goals being installed in the local park so young people could have access to informal football whilst the pitch is out of action. This shows the level of feeling in the community and how important the pitch is to the local area. Not investing in this scheme was not considered an option for local sport or the local community, it would also have a longer term financial and staff resource implication for the Council as there would be a need to upgrade and bring the facility back into use at a later date.

502 Sustainable Modes of Travel to School Strategy

The Chair invited Cllr Dorothy Maxwell to speak. Cllr Maxwell queried the cost of school transport and reinforced the need to encourage children to cycle and walk to school. Cllr Maxwell suggested that more use could be made of public buses while noting the requirement of provision of travel for those pupils with SEND considerations.

Cllr Lyn Buckingham was then invited to address the Executive. Cllr Buckingham welcomed the report and the consultation process that would commence if approved. Cllr Buckingham noted that the latest Sustainable Modes of Travel to School guidance from government had only recently been published and should be reflected within the consultation so parents could better understand the partnership between them and schools.

The Chair then invited Cllr Scott Edwards, Executive Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills to introduce a report that sought to provide an update on the progress of the Sustainable Travel to Education Strategy and further sought approval for its public consultation.

Cllr Edwards noted that the Council had a statutory duty to produce and publish a Sustainable Modes of Travel to School Strategy on an annual basis. The report before members was a positive opportunity to examine travel habits for children attending local schools, with a six-week consultation planned seeking input from schools, parents and pupils. The strategy would be reviewed and updated following the consultation and be brought back to Executive for adoption.

It was heard that the draft strategy had been developed in line with other strategic and emerging Council policies such as the Corporate Plan, Local Development Framework, Greenway Strategy and Local Walking and Cycling Investment Plans.

Cllr Edwards outlined the four main elements to promoting sustainable modes of transport to schools, noting that the engagement would facilitate conversation about current and future journeys to educational settings and would also ensure more effective adoption and delivery of the plan.

Four strategy targets were detailed to the meeting as below:

- Children and young people aged between 5 and 18 should average at least 16 minutes of moderate or intensely physical activity every day
- Every school should have a School Travel Plan by 2023
- All schools should have an Air Quality rating below WHO air pollution limits
- 55% of primary school aged children walk to school by 2025

Cllr Edwards detailed the benefits of utilising sustainable modes of transport to access education, both physical and mental, also noting the beneficial community impacts such as increased footfall for businesses and reduced parking issues, traffic congestion and driving emissions.

Cllr Matt Binley spoke to offer support for the report in encouraging individuals to use active forms of transport to get to school. Parking around schools remained an issue with certain schools in North Northamptonshire.

The Chair stated that development of such strategies by the Council offered beneficial impacts for everyone involved.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive agreed to the consultation of the Sustainable Travel to Education Strategy for six weeks from 14th September to 26th October 2023.

Reason for Recommendations: The consultation of the Strategy allows for the community and in particularly the school community to comment on the strategy whilst complying with the requirements to have an updated strategy by the required deadline of 19th September.

Alternative Options Considered:

- To adopt the Sustainable Modes of Travel Strategy and engage with the community through its delivery
- Not update the Northamptonshire Sustainable Modes of Travel Strategy.

None of these options are recommended.

503 The Chief Principal Social Worker's Annual Report

The Chair invited Cllr Helen Harrison, Executive Member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing to introduce the Chief Principal Social Worker's Annual Report. Cllr Harrison noted that Sarah Morris, the Chief Principal Social Worker was in attendance to provide a thorough overview of the work undertaken during 2022/23, her reflections on this and the priorities for work in 2023/24.

Cllr Harrison noted that the role of the Chief Principal Social Worker was to lead and oversee the support, learning and development of social workers and social care workers to develop excellent social care practice for the people of North Northamptonshire.

Sarah Morris was then invited to present her annual report that offered the opportunity to reflect on the past year, the progress made and challenges faced, as well as priorities identified for 2023/24. It was noted that the report laid out a number of areas regarding learning and development and detailed the achievements made in 2022/23.

It was reported that the Council worked alongside a number of universities offering accredited courses, with three social worker apprentices recently concluding their degrees and qualifying. A further five individuals were a year into their course with another five recommended to begin their degree courses. In addition, courses were available in respect of more specialist roles, including Approved Mental Health Professionals, Best Interest Assessors and Practice Educators. Less formal development courses were also available for social workers and social care workers.

The meeting heard that work had been undertaken in tandem with colleagues in the Housing Team in relation to the use of the Mental Capacity Act, and the delivery of training regarding the Safeguarding Adults Review.

It was noted that as Chair of the Social Worker Development Group, Sarah and colleagues had worked together to develop the learning social care workers required, with a monthly practice audit put in place to audit work on particular cases to better understand the quality of work being delivered.

It was noted that as part of the support in place for social workers, the Chief Social Worker for England had met with colleagues and been impressed with work undertaken, with the visit boosting team morale. It was heard that Sarah offered support with individual cases or managers having Human Resources concerns and was the single point of contact with Social Work England.

It was reported that Sarah also Chaired the Learning and Development Group for Northamptonshire Safeguarding Adults Board, which fitted well with learning and development needs across the rest of the service. Work was also focussed on developing strength-based best practice, putting people at centre of what the team was doing and drawing on resources within the local community. A practice framework detailing how Adult Social Work colleagues would like to deliver social care across North Northamptonshire had been developed and rolled out across the team.

The meeting noted positive feedback from Local Government Association (LGA) annual social work health-check, staff felt that the Council was providing more continuous professional development, although workloads had been highlighted as a challenge and work was ongoing work in reviewing structures to ensure manageable caseloads for staff.

With regards to future priorities, work was required around the area of assurance, developing a much clearer understanding of performance and reporting mechanisms. The other main priority was co-production, working with the people of North Northamptonshire regarding services offered and receiving feedback to better improve services.

Cllr Harrison thanked Sarah for her report and attendance, noting that the contents were very positive and that training programmes in place allowed the Council to develop its own staff, with feedback from the LGA being hugely positive. It was also noted that being clear about challenges and the direction the service needed to go in was beneficial.

The Chair spoke to note the positive feedback from the LGA for a Council that was still in its infancy.

Cllr David Brackenbury spoke to welcome the clarity and easy reading of the report which provided good explanation to non-specialists. Cllr Brackenbury noted the high level of positivity around the service, noting that morale and good leadership were key in achieving this.

RESOLVED

That the Executive accepted and noted the Chief Principal Social Worker's Annual Report and agrees the priorities for the forthcoming year.

Reasons for Recommendation- These priorities are ones which have been identified through the Chief Principal Social Worker's work, through work with the Senior Leadership Team and with front line workers, and they align with Adult Social Care's priorities to provide an excellent service for the people of North Northamptonshire.

Further priorities may be identified during the year and work picked up. The Chief Principal Social Worker's work includes wider themes and priorities will continuously be monitored and reviewed.

Alternative Options Considered: The Chief Principal Social Worker is responsible for completing an annual report to highlight work undertaken, priorities for the forthcoming year and the Chief PSW's view of the Council's Adult Social Care Services. As such it is important the Executive is provided with the same report that has been presented to Corporate Leadership Team; not to do so would leave Executive without information that has been presented to CLT and that is provided within an annual report from a postholder within a role which sits within statute.

504 Energy Procurement Contract

The Chair invited Cllr Matt Binley, Executive Member for Highways, Travel and Assets to present a report that sought approval to secure a new energy broker contract with the intention of harmonising Council energy supplies across its whole estate from 1st October 2024 until September 2028, utilising a public buying organisation (PBO) under a fully managed service.

The meeting noted the various energy supply contracts inherited from legacy authorities, with these contracts set to expire in September 2024 offering an opportunity for harmonisation and obtaining improved value for money. By continuing to use a PBO, energy could be procured at better rates, while the organisation would invest in and retain the resources to provide energy monitoring and advice whilst providing a proactive, knowledgeable resource to monitor accounts and challenge utility providers on the Council's behalf.

Cllr Binley made reference to Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin and recent reports that on days of low wind and solar power generation, electricity was derived from fossil fuel sources instead. It was noted that the cost of entering into such a scheme would be approximately £500,000 per annum more expensive and it was therefore not proposed to pursue such a scheme and instead explore options for direct investment into other energy projects which could offset the Council's carbon footprint, such as energy efficiency projects or retrofitting buildings with renewable energy sources.

The meeting heard that the proposal had been reviewed by the Sustainable Communities EAP, with their observations highlighted, specifically concerns raised regarding Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive: -

- a) Noted the requirement to progress the procurement of a new energy contract to take effect from 1st October 2024
- b) Approved the procurement of Energy Supplies via a Public Buying Organisation, noting the proposed use of a Flexible Purchase in Advance (PIA) option, subject to the rates received.
- c) Approved the purchase of a Fully Managed Service (FMS) including a bureau service.
- d) Delegated authority to the Executive Member for Highways, Travel & Assets, in consultation with the Assistant Director Assets & Environment to procure and award the contract following conclusion of the Council procurement process.

Reason for Recommendations:-

- To accord with the Council's procurement requirements.
- To support the Council's carbon management plan, and target to be carbon neutral by 2030.
- The recommended approach allows the Council to be supported by energy expertise and corporate landlord monitoring.
- The recommended approach supports budget forecasting by mitigating the risks of having supplies out of contract.

Alternative Options Considered:

- The Council currently does not have the expertise or resources available to undertake an individual procurement for energy supply, as the sovereign councils, like most Local Authorities, utilised public buying organisations.
- Do Nothing – this is not an option as it would not comply with procurement legislation or the Council's procurement policy. Additional costs would arise as any supplies not part of an agreed contract would be liable for 'out of contract' penalty rates. Moreover, there will be high uncertainty around utility costs as their prices are directly affected by market volatility.

505 The Establishment of a North Northamptonshire Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education

The Chair invited Cllr Scott Edwards, Executive Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills to introduce a report that sought approval for the establishment of a North Northamptonshire Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE), a statutory duty under the Education Act 1996.

Cllr Edwards noted that the current SACRE was countywide, with the proposal seeking the establishment of a North Northamptonshire specific SACRE, a body that supported the effective provision of Religious Education and collective worship in schools, with a multi-denominational membership.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive approved the establishment of a North Northamptonshire SACRE.

Reasons for Recommendation:

- To ensure the best outcomes for all children in North Northamptonshire for Religious Education (RE) and collective worship, and access to a high quality RE curriculum.
- To ensure that the following SACRE duties are met for North Northamptonshire Council:
 - Advise the local authority (LA) on matters related to agreed syllabus Religious Education (RE) and collective worship;
 - Publish an Annual Report on its work and on actions taken by its representative groups;
 - Monitor the provision and quality of Agreed Syllabus RE and of collective worship in order to provide targeted advice and support on teaching Agreed Syllabus RE;
 - Advise the LA on the provision of training of teachers;
 - Consider complaints about RE and collective worship referred to them by their LA;
 - Consider whether changes need to be made to the Agreed Syllabus, in partnership with the LA;
 - Offer advice to the LA in respect of the Agreed Syllabus and its implementation.

Alternative Options Considered: There are no alternative options as legally each local authority must have its own SACRE according to Section 390 of the Education Act 1996. There is no reason why North Northamptonshire SACRE cannot work collaboratively with West Northamptonshire SACRE once they are both established in the future should this be agreeable.

506 Budget Forecast Update 2023-24 - Period 4

The Chair invited Cllr Anne Lee to address the meeting. Cllr Lee expressed concerns in regard to the continued overspend of Northamptonshire Children's Trust and the possibility that the organisation could fail to deliver further planned savings. Cllr Lee also sought clarity regarding specific items contained within the appendix to the budget report.

Cllr Lyn Buckingham was then invited to address the Executive. Cllr Buckingham echoed concerns regarding the Children's Trust and also queried mitigations in place for the Dedicated Schools Grant overspend. Cllr Buckingham also sought clarity regarding savings details in the appendix to the report.

The Chair thanked the speakers for their attendance before inviting Cllr Lloyd Bunday, Executive Member for Finance and Transformation to introduce a report that set out the forecast outturn position for the Council based on the Period 4 monitoring forecasts for the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the Dedicated Schools Grant.

The meeting heard that the overall forecast for the General Fund, as at Period 4, was a forecast overspend of £7.354m based on the emerging data for 2023/24.

It was reported that uncertainty remained regarding the level of pay award for staff for 2023/24 as this was yet to be agreed. The main budgetary pressure remained that of the Children's Trust where the forecast overspend was £22.954m, an increase of £768,000 since the last reporting period. The cost to the Council of this overspend was £10.136m, with the meeting noting that this pressure would pose a significant financial risk to the Council should it not be mitigated.

Cllr Bunday made reference to directorate budgets, including those of Adults Services showing a £750,000 adverse movement, with the service seeing a significant increase in demand-led services. Public Health and Communities had a £100,000 adverse movement with the main factor being supplies and service costs. The Place directorate was showing an £874,000 favourable movement due to a reduction in utility costs, an increase in planning fees and reduction in operating costs.

The Council's overall outturn forecast for the Housing Revenue Account was an overspend of £16,000.

It was also reported that the Dedicated Schools Grant had a forecast pressure of £4m, with pressures relating to the high needs funding block that supported SEND provision.

Inflationary impact and changes in demand-led service volumes provided the main challenges to the Council's budgetary position going forward, with officers and members working hard to balance finances while protecting vital services, particularly those for the most vulnerable residents.

Cllr Helen Harrison spoke to note the importance of paying staff appropriately for their work and referenced the unprecedented level of service demand on Adult Services. It was heard that urgent work was required to understand and consequently mitigate these pressures.

Cllr Scott Edwards made reference to the frustration at the continued overspend by the Children's Trust and also raised the issue of the Dedicated Schools Grant overspend and the need to understand the increase in demand that had led to that position.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- a) Noted the Council's forecast outturn position for 2023/24 as summarised in Section 4, alongside the further analysis, risks and other considerations as set out in Section 5 to Section 7 of the report.
- b) Noted the assessment of the current deliverability of the 2023/24 savings proposals in **Appendix A**.
- c) Approved an increase in the gross budget of £471k to be funded from the Homelessness Prevention Grant for Ukraine as set out in paragraph 5.71.

Reason for Recommendations – to note the forecast financial position for 2023/24 as at Period 4 and consider the impact on this year and future years budgets.

Alternative Options Considered: The report focuses on the forecast revenue outturn against budget for 2023/24 and makes recommendations for the Executive to note the current budgetary position as such there are no specific choices within the report.

507 Urgent Items

Cllr Scott Edwards read out a statement on behalf of The Leader of the Council, Cllr Jason Smithers that offered heartfelt thanks to the Executive Director of Children's Services, AnnMarie Dodds for her hard work and commitment to the Council, her staff, members and most importantly everyone in North Northamptonshire the Council served during her tenure.

The statement noted that being the Director of Children's Services was not an easy job, but AnnMarie had carried out her role steadfastly with her knowledge and experience being invaluable to Cllr Edwards as portfolio holder, the Leader and other Executive colleagues.

The meeting noted that AnnMarie had been in the role since March 2022, and as Assistant Director prior to that, being instrumental in the safe transition of Children's Services from the former county council to North Northamptonshire Council and through this professional leadership the Council had secured significant levels of funding to help develop family hubs in the area. In addition, there had been school upgrades and capital improvement works, improvements to SEND provision and a range of measures and initiatives that put the Council in a stronger position to move forward.

The Leader's statement concluded by wishing AnnMarie well in her new role at another authority, noting that she would leave Children's Services in a good position for her successor to pick up from.

Cllr Edwards stated that he had learnt much in his current role from AnnMarie and offered his own thanks to her for that.

Chair

Date

The meeting closed at 12.57 pm